

Death and Autism

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Death and Autism

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Summary

As a child, I got invited to a party. Fun, right? Except the host is an undead ghost bird... and the entry fee is my death. Hold on to your seats. This is a WILD, thrill seeking, terrifying, emotional rollercoaster. Will I live? Or is death knocking at my doorstep? Read on and find out! (This takes place in "this reality". Yes, the one you are reading right now.

Chapter 1: Dodging Death

Chapter Notes

Psst! Author here. It's a smart idea to click on the links because the story and the music prevalent in the chapters go hand in hand. Plus, they give you a very good idea of what is going on in the main character's mind.

I was five years old when my deadly monster under my bed appeared. I was about to fall asleep when I heard a fruity voice laughing almost maniacally. I feel feathers brushing against my face. I curl up tightly under my weighted blanket, whimpering. I hear that fruity voice condescending me, "Trying to hide from your host, are we? Well, that's not very nice! The party starts soon and you are not dressed! Hoo-hoo-hoo-hoo-hoo-hoo-hoo! I will pick out a delightful party outfit and death for you!" I feel talons grabbing me, and I gaze into a face that seem to come out of a cartoonish hell. I see a pair of orange, swirling, glowing eyes gazing into my soul...

I awaken from my nightmare with a start, my heart beating really fast in my chest. *I'm 23 years old. I'm much too old to have a monster under my bed!* I remind myself harshly, tugging a stubborn strand of hair out of my face. I get out of bed, groaning. I wash my face, my short brown hair in a really messy high ponytail. My hazel eyes had bags underneath them from the countless all nighters I have been pulling to get chapters of Sonicphobia: The Director's Cut done on top of doing history homework. I stretch my legs, admiring their ballerina-esque nature. Then I glance at my watch. 10:30. I better get to school. I move around my tiny home, getting my sweater out and jog outside.

It was a beautiful, crisp, autumn morning. I breathe in the smell of autumn. My life has been so well since I got doxxed back in September. I start trekking through Norwich, my eyes wide with wonder. I love this time of year so much. I kick through the leaves like a child, giggling madly as I skip to school. My foot kicked something that skittered. I freeze, then bend down to have a closer look. It looked like some kind of shiny rock. Almost like the gem my monster wore on his vest. I lift it, admiring the texture. It seemed to swirl in the light almost as if it was driven by magic. *Nonsense.* I told myself. *Magic is just unexplained science.* I put the stone in my pocket, unaware of the troubles it was going to bring. I place my hand in my pocket. I felt something like a feather in my pocket. One problem: I don't have any feathers on me.

I know my monster well. He is seemingly owl shaped with plumicorns, obsessed with death, and he comes off as flippant, friendly and very flamboyant. He is well dressed for a monster, with a hot pink vest and matching bowtie. He is the color of a night sky, or the pupil of an iris: blacker than night. His only calling card that he visited me was a single black feather. Usually the feather is tucked into a doll, hidden in a bookshelf, stuffed under my bed or tucked behind an article of clothing. It's been literal years since I last saw this calling card.

My mother always told me that I was being ridiculous. I sigh, pulling the feather out to examine it. My face paled as I saw the color. The feather was black, with a brilliant purple outline. *He's back... and something tells me he would do anything to kill me now that I'm 23.* I refuse to say his name. I don't want to summon him.

I hear a familiar voice comment, "My, oh, my. Is that my little party dodger? You have grown so much since I last saw you. You practically blossomed while I was simply waiting for you to say yes to my little invitation. So, make your choice, darling. There are a lot of deaths to pick from. So, my dear, would you rather be stabbed? Strangled? Crushed? Oh-hoo! How about poison?" I see something black out of the corner of my eye. I don't fuck around and find out.

I take off running to my bus stop, hopping on the bus and sliding the card at the nick of time. I hurriedly sit by the inside seat and grip the handlebars tightly. I take out my earbuds and put one in my ear. As I arrived at the bus terminal, I could clearly see some sort of violet mist following the bus, followed by the sound of hooting laughter. I hop on my bus, swearing under my breath.

I pant in the safety of the bus. My face paled as I peeked outside. I can see his orange, swirling eyes gazing at me almost maniacally. I shudder, since it was like looking into the eyes of the devil. I shuddered as his face shifted into something Picasso would draw, with his mouth shifting to the side before he vanished behind a pillar. The bus pulled away from that weird sight, and I breathed in relief. "Crazy hellbird is gone." I grumbled to myself as the bus started driving.

I began listening and humming to Melanie Martinez's *K-12* album when I hear that awful hooting sound. I glance and see *him* gazing at me, his face twisted cartoonishly like a Picasso painting on a black canvas. If it wasn't real life, I would be laughing right now. But it's real, and he hooted, "Oh-hoo-hoo-hoo-hoo! Did you know that there are several ways you can die on this bus? You could get into a crash and have your pretty neck impaled by glass! Or you could ram your pretty little head into a metal pipe! Ooh! You can get strangled by the hanging things on here! Imagine your adorable little face turning purple! Or getting run over by the bus as you board it!" He chuckled crazily, stretching his neck to be by my ear. He whispered, causing me to shudder, "It would be a beautiful death that is fitting for a beautiful girl like yourself." He placed one talon against my throat and gently traced my chin, guiding my face to meet his insane, swirling eyes.

I hum, nodding my head to the bouncy rhythm. I didn't hear Barnaby until he pulled my headphones out to repeat what he just said. That earned him a very annoyed and angry glare from me.

I glare, stating coldly, "There is a one in a 305,644 chance of that happening. And the odds of getting hit by one of the SEAT buses is a one in 495000. I'm not stupid enough to put my neck through one of those things." I get to my college, slipping out rapidly. *And everyone wonders why I have depression and anxiety.* I scoff to myself. I am too aware of my own mortality, and this fucking owl is just rubbing it in. He materialized next to me with hooting laughter.

“Your determination to live this dull, sad life inspires me!” He hooted. I run inside of Three Rivers, panting. “You cannot outrun death, silly!” He called, rolling his orange eyes. I turn, running backwards and performing a triple middle finger.

Then I ran to find my friends. I got to the food pantry, finding it full of people. I start making my coffee, but just as I go to pick it up, I decide to check on the temperature. I put my fingers against the paper cup, and that almost got me burned. “OW! SONUVABITCH!” I scream, leaping back. I didn’t get seriously burned, but it looked like my hot cocoa-coffee treat was *boiling*. “What the hell? Keurigs do not get that hot! I used that thing dozens of times, and I never had this-!?” I glanced behind me, since I heard a familiar, fruity, hooting laugh. I see that wicked bird waving with a wing, his orange tongue sticking out. “Oh, you feathery fucker.” I snarl. I get a little bit too angry when someone messes with my coffee. Last guy who did that ended up in the hospital for diarrhea. “This is officially WAR!” I yelled at him, before lowering my voice to hiss at him. “That shit just won’t stand! Listen, you feathered bastard! You stepped over my feet one too many times, and I will rip your lungs out your asshole! You’ll d-!?”

I get interrupted with a hooting chuckle from that feathered version of hell incarnate. “Short tempered little thing, aren’t you? I could use that sort of passion for my parties.” That dreadful bird commented. “It’s an easy thing, dearie. All you need to do is *die*!” He hooted, his pink bowtie spinning cartoonishly.

I spat venomously, “Go fuck yourself!” I grab a sandwich from the freezer and leaped away as the freezer started sparking as if it was on fire.

He hooted back, “I have no desire for that!”

“Quit trying to kill me, you fucking asshat!” I growl, kicking him in the shin. He vanished with a maniacal grin, sticking his tongue out. I quickly finish grabbing my food, being careful to stay away from the freezers. I run out of there to the cafeteria. I dodge a falling fixture, yelling, “Fucking hell!” This was just the beginning of my troubles.

Chapter 2: Little Psycho

I get to the cafeteria, fuming over the waste of perfectly good hot cocoa powder. This is definitely not a good sensory day for me. I try to sit at a booth for yet another life fixture to try to fall on me. I scoot away in the nick of time to see *him* gazing at me. “You.” I growled, ready to yank him by the ear feathers. He gazed back, his red pupils focused on me.

“Me?” He asked innocently, hooting. He stroked his wing feathers, standing up and stretching. He easily towered over me. Half of the cafeteria glanced at me. I see my friends approaching me. He hooted, disappearing into a whirl of smoke.

“Arrogant ass.” I grumbled. I sat with my other friends, all of them autistic. Our little friend group is like a family. I’m the oldest at 23 years old. I’m the pansexual mom of the group. Then there is Aliyah, a perky bisexual lass of 21. Then there is Thomas, the only dude in the group who is also really good at Magic: The Gathering at 19. And there is Lain, the youngest one of the group at 18. They all noticed that I was not exactly myself.

“Ali? What’s up?” Lain asked. They hugged me (something that I desperately craved and needed). I hug back, biting back tears. Then I began talking about what happened, going into great detail. I reach for the gem as proof of my misfortune... only to find it gone.

“Ali, that sounds wild.” Thomas pointed out. He excused himself, snagging one of my hot chocolate packs. “Gonna make you a coffee. Sounds like you are having a bad day because that so-called crazy owl of yours is preventing you from having your caffeine fix. We all know that you become similar to Chucky if you don’t get your coffee fix.” All of my friends know exactly how I get when I don’t drink coffee: I become a little homicidal and cranky... Some could say that I act similarly to a certain ghost owl who hosts parties. That bat shit crazy owl did not help matters at all; in some ways, he made my dour mood worse.

Aliyah piped up, “Ali? Describe the ‘nutty owl’ that you have been so angry about.” I describe everything, his black feathers, his hot pink vest and bowtie, his white shirt, even down to the facial features. I added the fact that he had a purple outline almost as if he was hand animated into the real world. Aliyah was silent, her dark complexion brooding over something. Then she said the one sentence that I wish she hadn’t said. “Alison, I believe that you saw Barnaby, that owl from that game Billie Bust Up. You haven’t been playing video games before going to bed again, have you?” I have a predisposition for doing things on the Internet when I’m supposed to be asleep, such as playing video games and writing fanfiction. She showed me a picture of Barnaby. He looked like this:

Lain glanced to their left, and their brown eyes widened. Aliyah glanced over and she paled under her dark skin. “What?” I ask, irritable. Then I noticed the owl shaped shadow over me. I groan, irritated. “Barnaby’s right behind me, isn’t he?” Both of them nodded, and I glance over my shoulder. I see Barnaby towering over me in all of his terrifying, eleven foot tall glory. He shrank down to a good six feet four inches minus the plumicorns. “You are aware

that I'm much more pleasant when I'm not having an eleven foot tall Card Against Humanity towering over me and trying to make me push up daisies, right?" I addressed the giant ghost owl.

He hooted, his fruity voice at speaking level, "No need to shout at me!"

"Oh, there is a need to shout at you." I replied shortly.

Aliyah added, "Ali does tend to be an asshole when she does not get her coffee. And she talks about murder when she is really pissed off." Then I took a closer look, and I realized that there was a detail I hadn't noticed before. *He was wearing the same gem on his chest by a gold chain!* I realized. I point at his bling and yell, "OI! There is that gem I was talking about!"

Barnaby glared at me, his orange eyes narrowed. He moved a talon over as if I was about to steal it. "You took my stuff." He huffed, starting to become larger.

"Sorry I found it on the ground and admired it! I won't make THAT mistake twice!" I shot back. Aliyah and Lain were silent. Other people noticed, though. "I'm still ready to make you double dead for the stunt you pulled in the pantry with my coffee." I added bitterly. There was more silence... until Barnaby started laughing at me. I growl, gritting my teeth and basically crushing a soda can I snagged from the food pantry earlier. Lain gasped, and Aliyah covered her mouth.

Barnaby giggled, then he managed to compose himself. Now he is a staggering eight feet four inches minus the plumicorns. He teasingly hooted, his plumicorns ruffled, "I just got a glimpse of your inner party animal... and I must say that I adore it!"

I had enough at this point. I slam the crushed up soda can hard into the table, crumpling it up to nothing. Then I put on my best Southern accent and exclaimed sweetly, "Bless your heart, Barnaby! But you see, my darling zombie skittle, you have made a serious mistake!"

Barnaby hooted, his tongue sticking out, "Zombie skittle? I love that nickname! Why would you call me such a thing, my fellow party animal?"

I reply, "As a pansexual, I have a built in gay-dar. You are fruity as fuck, and you mistaken me for someone who loves to miss out on their coffee! Don't test your luck, zombie skittle!" I pull him by the bowtie and drag him close to emphasize my point. "Don't. Ever. Fuck. With. My. Coffee. Again." He hooted, making himself thirteen feet tall and he lifted me up to eye level.

"Your enthusiasm inspires me!" He cheerfully hooted, completely missing the point and misreading my anger. I was now officially irked. "But we can't have that mortal coil clinging to you like a leech!" He added, annoyed. "It just won't do!"

My eye twitched at this. He seemed to have forgotten that this was a public place. I squirm loose and land on my feet like a parkour runner. I straighten myself out with a glare. Everyone is gazing at me now. "You pushed your luck, Barnaby. Laugh now, but try laughing when you're double dead." I made my tone deadly quiet as I picked up my things. Thomas

handed me another cup of coffee. I was grateful it wasn't boiling over this time. I drink it deeply, my eyes narrowed to slits. Barnaby looked about ready to choke me, so I walked away.

"Oh-hoo-hoo-hoo-hoo! You think school is a safe place? Let's spin the wheel and see what kills you!" He cackled. I grab my things and finish my coffee. I streak to my only class: History. Barnaby chased me through the halls, hooting as passersby glanced at me.

I made it to my history teacher's class, slipping inside at the nick of time. I opt to sit on the floor away from anything that could kill me. My history teacher glanced at me. He asked, "Alison? Why are you not sitting in a seat at this lecture?" I love my history teacher. He is generally quite accommodating. Just as I begin briefly explaining, my reason for sitting on the floor (also known as Barnaby) burst through the door with a crazed grin. I whip my head over to see Barnaby ducking his head. His wings brushed the floor as he crouched in the class.

"(Insert Professor name here), meet the reason why I'm sitting on the floor." I gesture to Barnaby, being as flippant and as rude as possible.

"Call me Barnaby!" He introduced himself, shaking my teacher's hand a bit too enthusiastically. Then he sat next to me. I start taking notes. The minute the flapper era was mentioned, Barnaby had something to say. "I remember that fashion!" He blurted out. Everyone in class was hooked on what Barnaby had to say. He said that it was the rage to enjoy life when he died.

I finally blurt out, "So you're going to tell me you were around for the fall of the Romanovs and the rise of Stalin!? You were alive before Hitler became a dictator!?" Barnaby stretched his neck to me, staring into my eyes. I added hastily, "And you probably witnessed the fall of the Ottoman empire? L-lucky!" Barnaby grinned creepily before putting his forehead against mine. I freeze as I saw glimpses of his past life.

I caught glimpses of the clothes people wore in the 1920s, female animals wearing flapper clothes. Barnaby himself wore only a purple vest and white shirt. His feathers were that of a screech owl, and he had a ring on one talon. He carried a tiny baby into his arms. Before I could get a good look, I saw him in a science laboratory. I saw him tinkering with a stone before a blinding gold flash filled my vision...

I was jolted back. My eyes were wide with terror. I panted, trembling. I gaze at Barnaby, horrified. He got his neck back into position, his bowtie spinning. He flapped his wings a couple of times, settling in with a smug sounding hoot.

After class was over, I ran out of there, deciding to be with my friends again. Aliyah was in the cafeteria. I told her what I saw, my eyes huge. I was talking too fast to realize that Barnaby was standing behind me, this time opting to be fourteen feet tall. I was too excited to share what I found out. I hear a hooting laugh behind me. I glance up and rush to the bus, terrified. *Not crossing Barnaby twice!* I reminded myself as I made the bus ride home.

Chapter 3: You're Invited!

I was in quite a foul mood when I got off the bus near my house, and Barnaby just made my sour mood much worse with his murder attempts. I can see Barnaby trying harder to kill me. I narrowly avoided a losing game of Frogger as I crossed the street to my own home, dodged a falling branch, and outran the neighborhood dog which tried to attack me for some stupid reason.

I slipped inside of my home in the nick of time, panting while having the beginning throes of an autistic meltdown. Then I storm to my room, trying my best not to cry. I get to my room. It was a little messy but not too unbearable. I see my cat snuggling close to the weighted blanket. Even though Rusty is getting on in his years, his orange fur and little face never cease to make my day better. I scoop him up in my arms and sob, "Rusty, oh, Rusty! I am having a really bad sensory day!"

I snuggle into his fur, letting the tears flow freely. My brother is in the military, my big sister and little sister is in England, and my mother is living on her own in a cabin out in the woods. I'm the only one managing my childhood house. My cat started kneading biscuits in my jeans. "Ow! Baby Rusty! Nails!" I yelp, chuckling.

I take off my clothes with the intention of slipping into pajamas. I wrap myself tightly in my weighted blanket, sobbing. *This day is the absolute worst!* I sob to myself, rolling on my side. I curled up in a ball and sobbed. I fell asleep and I didn't dream of anything. Rusty kept kneading biscuits on my blanket, making me feel better. I sang "The Tornado" by Owl City just to try to make myself feel better as I fell asleep.

<https://youtu.be/6WK6iQfS-FY?si=TeushaS6mzx61H-j>

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The next morning, I woke up to some blurry black and orange thing really close to my face. I yelp, falling out of bed. "Goddamn it!" I yell, hitting the floor with a thud. I fumbled around for my glasses, grabbing them and narrowly avoiding the cat tree falling on me. Rusty was hissing, spitting and growling. I put my glasses on, and my vision sharpened. Barnaby was standing over my bed. "For fuck's sake!" I snarl. Then I glance down. To my own embarrassment, I was naked. I cover myself with my snuggie, shrieking, "Fuck off!"

Barnaby huffed, his hot pink jacket somehow looking pristine, "Good morning to you too! Hoo-hoo-hoo-ha-ha!" At least he had the common sense to turn his gaze away. I put on a pair of jeans, and Rusty climbed up my leg, his nails digging into me. Barnaby stretched his neck down to my cat, who was still hissing and spitting. I was letting loose enough swears to make an Israeli sailor blush. Barnaby pulled his neck back into his normal position, tscking at me. "You are so enthusiastic about dying this morning. That charger of yours is looking tempting." Barnaby commented.

"Sh-shut up..." I managed to stutter through a faceful of my Pikachu pillow. My face was bright red with embarrassment. I add waspishly, "Stop trying to change my damn routine.

You should know this just as well as I do.” I made this comment as he hooted and flapped his wings. I pat my face aggressively, trying to calm down.

“I’m not changing your silly little routine. I’m telling you what will happen.” He retorted, puffing his feathers. “Death is a part of your ridiculous little routine today.”

I glare. I spit out, “Go. Fuck. Yourself.” I make the sentence so soft and full of venom that it should make anyone quiver.

Barnaby hooted, flapping his wings, “I don’t wish to do that. There’s too much work involved. Ugh!” He emphasized this by T-posing and falling onto my table with a weirdly satisfying thud. I couldn’t bite it back anymore. I crack up. The sight of a thirteen foot tall ghost owl spreading himself on my table like a tired bird is enough to get me laughing. He peeked at me, his orange eyes sparkling. His red pupils were sort of dilated, almost as if he was pleased by my reaction.

My cat was still in orange puff mode. I stroke his fur reassuringly. I commented to myself, “What are you on and where can I get some?” I added a little bit more loudly, “Asking for a friend, if you are overhearing that.”

Barnaby smirked, his orange tongue sticking out. Something told me that I was going to hate the answer. He replied, hooting, “Ah-hoo-hoo-hoo-hoo! I’m on the afterlife, with some deadly nightshade! I can give you some... *free of charge~!*” He winked almost flirtatiously. “And then the fun will begin!” He spread his wings wide, as if to take flight.

I gaze, my mouth hanging open in shock and horror at what he just said. I quickly compose myself, grumbling, “I take it back. I don’t want to know.” I call my friends on the group call. Lain was the first to answer. “Good morning.” I chirp, watching Barnaby warily. “Uh, you remember the zombie skittle issue I had yesterday? It’s... at my house. And I don’t think it is going to let me live through breakfast and it might try to kill me with my caffeine again.”

My friends arrived within twenty minutes of my cry for help. Lain got to my house first, their brown eyes filled with worry. Then Aliyah and Thomas arrived. Thomas’s dirty blonde hair was tousled as if he had just woken up. Barnaby picked himself up, gently stroking his feathers as if he was contemplating something like a cartoon villain. He hooted as my friends arrived. He got a little too close to my friends, stretching his neck across the room as if he was in a cartoon. Lain asked, “Ali? You look angry, tired and hungry.” Admittedly, I didn’t sleep well because of the anxiety of being killed in my own bed and I was also worried that he might try to kill my cat.

Lain started making breakfast while Barnaby was hooting, flapping his wings. He chirped happily, “Did you know you could die from salmonella? Or E. Coli?” He was trying to make Lain nervous on purpose. I felt as if I was forgetting something important about Barnaby, but I couldn’t remember what.

I growl, getting really close to Barnaby and shoving my thoughts to the side, “Leave my friends alone.” I glare at his orange eyes, which are glowing like a pair of spotlights. I add, “Don’t you dare cross me.” I made sure my voice is full of venom.

He hooted, “Aww, you are so cute when you are trying to be serious.” He emphasized this by lightly poking my nose with his talon. Then he reclined in my dad’s old chair in the kitchen, commenting, “You know, little party dodger, you have that certain... how do you mortals put it? Ah! You have a certain *spice of life* that I find very endearing and inspiring. You will do wonderfully for my party!” He cackled maniacally. I glare at him in response, drumming my fingers on the table in Morse code. Thomas heard me drumming and immediately grabbed my shoulders. I stim with Morse code, and how I do it is a clear indicator of my mood. Right now, I was tapping my fingers three times rapidly, three times slowly, then three times rapidly again: SOS.

Barnaby chuckled maniacally, trying to hug me. I got really close to Thomas and Aliyah, hissing. I usually like hugs, but I don’t like hugs that come from homicidal birds. Thomas growled, “You seriously need to leave Ali and our friends alone!” Barnaby just hooted like the homicidal owl he is. Then he vanished, becoming purple mist.

“Good riddance!” Aliyah and I both grumbled at the same time, then I did the Jinx, knocking on wood and telling Aliyah she owes me a Dr Pepper. I love screwing up the Jinx game. We unanimously decided that it was best if I wasn’t left alone. It was a Saturday, and my friends just decided that today I cannot be left alone. We decided to walk around Norwich, enjoying the fall colors, eating the local food, and vibing at the library.

When we got back home from our day’s endeavors, I noticed that there was an envelope jammed haphazardly into my mailbox. My friends glanced at each other. It had a weird sigil, with a skull and a party hat to the side. I glance at my friends. They nod. We read the contents of the envelope, and it was terrifying. The note read:

*You’re invited to the Barnaby manor for a party that is to die for! However, since you are mortal, there are a few extra steps that you must take in order to attend my party~!*

*This invitation is activated by drawing my face on a door. Then you wait until 3:00 in the ante meridiem. Then stand in front of the door you drew the sigil on and say “Barnaby, it’s party time.” I will know if you tried to ignore this invitation, since there will be very dire consequences to ignoring it. Do bring your friends. The more, the merrier~! It’s to DIE for!*

*Barnaby Yenschuf, Baron of the Barrow*

I glance at my friends, my face pale. All of my friends were staring at me. I finally break the silence. “I hate saying this, but this feels like a threat.” Then I glance at my hand. There was a Barnaby-shaped mark on my left hand. “Shit!” I yelp. Then I stared at all of my friends. They had matching marks on them. They all glance, and the room broke out in panicked murmurs. I checked Rusty, relieved that no mark and no harm came to him. I breathe in relief. “Guys, you’re all going to hate my guts, but I don’t think we have a choice. *We have to go to that party and survive. We have to beat Barnaby at his own game. We can’t let him win.*”

## Chapter 4: An Unexpected Arrival

We decided to hold a “slumber party” that night. We tried to distract ourselves from the impending sense of doom that left a sour taste in everyone’s mouths due to the threatening nature of the invitation sent to us by that horrible hellbird that is fondly known as Barnaby to the Billie Bust Up community. Thomas taught us about Magic the Gathering, trying to distract us from the inevitable. To say that spirits are low would be a severe understatement. Everyone looked bleak, depressed, and even Lain and Aliyah looked as if all the joy had been drained from them.

I’m not handling this change in routine well, since death is overstimulating and upsetting for me. I look at all of my friends and I choke back sobs. I had zero idea that my brother would return from serving in the Marines. At midnight, we heard a knock at the door. I open the door, ready to chew out Barnaby. “You got a lot of nerve to show your face around-!” I began screaming, then I looked carefully at the newcomer. The newcomer was not a bird of any sort. I recognized him from the get-go. “Oh, welcome home! I am so sorry about that! I thought you were... someone else.” I momentarily forgot the invitation, hugging the newcomer.

“Yeah, yeah. Good to see you too, dork.” He replied, then he got a good look at me. I knew who the newcomer was. It was my own brother, David. His brown eyes narrow, his dirty blonde hair short. He pinned me against the wall. “Why did you lash out?” He asked, growling.

My friends and I immediately explained what was going on. He was listening, not quite believing us. When we were done explaining our depressing situation, he cocked his eyebrow at us. Something told us he didn’t quite believe us. I glance at my watch and froze. It took all of us two hours to explain the harrowing situation. It was now 2:59. “Fuck! Barnaby is going to fuck us up if we don’t hurry!” I yell, rushing to grab chalk. I trace Barnaby’s likeness on the closet door with lightning speed. It took all of my friends to hold him back and block my brother. He fought and swore. I stood in front of the door, sobbing. I dry my tears. I finally said the dreaded phrase.

“*Barnaby. It’s party time .*” My voice cracked as I said that horrible phrase. My brother gasped as the closet door glowed with an eerie green light. I open the closet door, finding myself looking into a desolate sight. The sky was an eerie green, his manor towering and foreboding. The Tiffany glass glowed with light. The stone architecture had owl motifs and gargoyles. The building had a commanding presence that also felt malevolent. I stepped through. My brother finally broke free. All of my friends chased after him as he tackled me.

“Alison May Black!” He growled, pinning me against a tombstone. “I will not let you go inside of that building!” It took Thomas and Aliyah to pull him off.

I flash the invitation in front of him. “I have to. Otherwise everyone we know and love would be killed. And you need to go. Leave. Stay out of this. This is between my childhood monster, my friends and myself. Go.” I made my tone sharp as I ordered him to go. He tried

to argue with me by trying to put on his Marine persona. "That was an order, soldier." I made my tone barking, sharp and clipped, like a drill sergeant. Everyone fell silent. I glance around for the door that led us here... only to find it completely gone. "Guess you are stuck with us." I told him waspishly. I turn and start walking up to the building. My knees were shaking badly.

The doors opened like a coffin, swinging outward towards the sky. I enter, and my friends follow behind. I keep my eyes sharp for any sign of the wicked bird. I checked his study, finding nobody there. My brother looked at a few paintings. He pointed to one of Barnaby. "Hey, look at that, Ali! It's your imaginary boyfriend! He looks just like you: weird and ugly!" He teased, obviously unaware of the very real danger. I glare at him in response. I was actually quite pretty but I have low self-esteem because my brother picks on me a lot.

Aliyah snapped at him, "Barnaby is not something or someone to joke about!" She cuffed him hard. He tried to cuff back, but Thomas grabbed him and stopped him. I was surprised that a guy with a skinny frame could stop a burly Marine like my brother. His combat fatigues were a stark contrast to our little friend group attire. Aliyah was wearing some serious cottage core attire with a dress that looks like a fairy have made a mushroom cap into a dress. I was wearing scene clothes, with tattered jeans, a choker, a striped shirt under my favorite Zombie Response Team t-shirt, and a pair of combat boots. Thomas wore jeans and a sweatshirt. Lain wore goth clothes.

Then we started walking towards the living room. Barnaby himself was absent. Then we glance up and saw the gem. My friends and I instinctively backed away. We all knew how much Barnaby hated having his shit touched without permission. My brother mistaken this for cowardice. He sneered, "All of you are cowering over a stupid jewel? I'm going to show you there's nothing to be afraid of!" Then he took off parkouring to the gem. We noticed some floating books.

"DAVE NO!" I yell, desperately trying to get him to stop. All of us immediately ran and hid in the study. I stayed behind, pressing in the shadows. I can only watch in horror as David touched the gem. The gem immediately seemed to absorb the shadows. I ran in the opposite direction, hiding in a chest. I can hear the conversation plainly.

Barnaby must have materialized because I hear Dave cry out in shock. "Trying to steal my stuff, are we?" Barnaby asked. He sounded pissed, and rightfully so. "Well, that's not very nice! With manners like that, I should *kick you out*. You're unfashionably early, anyways. The party does not start until 3:30." I can hear Barnaby rip my brother a new asshole with his fruity voice. "Wait a minute... wait a minute!" He sounded pretty damn contemplative to me. "You weren't invited. Unless... you are one of the party dodger's little friends!" He broke out in hooting laughter.

I glance out of my hiding spot cautiously. "How wrong is it that I bet on my brother dying due to his stupidity?" I whisper. My friends chuckle softly before doing the sign that clearly signified that I shouldn't say that. I was unaware that Barnaby's head was in the room. I hear something roll in the room. My friends froze. I hiss, "What?"

Then I hear that fruity bastard's voice. It sounded like it was right in front of my hiding spot. I peek out. I hear Barnaby tease, "Playing hide and seek, are we? Good thing I'm an expert!"

I glance down and nearly scream. His head was detached from his body and it was right in front of my hiding spot. His orange eyes gazed up at me, glowing like a pair of flashlights. He giggled maniacally as I climbed out. I pick up his head, my skin crawling.

“EEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEK!” I scream, almost dropping his head. Then I force myself to calm down. “What the fuck!?” I hissed. He giggled, biting his lip. I grumbled, “You seriously need to quit while you’re ahead there, Louis the Sixteenth.” I glare.

I hear footsteps. I see David running towards me. “ALISON! DROP THE HEAD! THAT THING IS A GHOST!” David shouted, his brown eyes wide. I see Barnaby’s face twist into a disgusted expression, his mouth shifting to the side of his head and glaring at my brother. Then the rest of Barnaby’s body came into view. It cuffed David across the head. “OW! STOP HITTING ME, GOTH DUO!” He growled.

He glared, poking David. “We can’t have that pesky mortal body clinging to all of you like leeches! It just won’t do!” He bit me to get me to drop him. I dropped his head out of shock. I bite back swears. Then he started looming over all of us. He spread his wings, “Make your choice. You choose the manner; *I do the deed*~.” He said this suggestively, raising his eyebrows and acting like he was talking dirty with one talon over his mouth. He winked slyly at me. “The fun will begin!” I could see David shaking visibly.

I decided to make a tactical maneuver. I do the time out symbol, winking at my brother and hidden companions. “Time out. I got to speak to my friends and my brother about this, since it is such a huge deal. We don’t want to die with a mockable death, so we gotta convene first.” I spoke. As Barnaby opened his mouth, I add, “We have got to discuss it between each other privately.” I was dripping sweat.

Barnaby froze, then he shrugged his gigantic wings as if to say, “Whatever, I don’t give a shit.” Then he hooted. “You have ten minutes to discuss it.” Then he left in a trail of purple mist. We look at each other and we had ten minutes to pick a death that is easy to survive. David was trying to be stoic, but I can see the fear in his eyes. I can hear him hooting as he was sharpening a knife in the background.

We decided to explore the manor to find a secret way out. I went with Thomas, Aliyah and Lain walked to the kitchen, and David was on his own. While we walked the halls, I start singing “The Principal” by Melanie Martinez to calm the fuck down. When I was done, I noticed an orange, round, pudgy looking ghost. It looked almost like a Boo from the Mario franchise, but it wore a top hat and a bowtie. It took one look at me and flew in the opposite direction, yelling, “Baron Barnaby! The living guests are upstairs! They didn’t choose death!”

<https://youtu.be/plJCH77VMoI?si=qGIO9q0CA5oazhPR>

I glance at Thomas. He nods, and we start running into the library. The floors had the same rug pattern as the one in the Shining, the hexagons scaring me. “Where are those twins when you need them?” I note dryly as we weaved between bookshelves.

I hear Barnaby’s voice echo through the entire room, causing bookshelves to shake, “No death? *Let’s spin the wheel!*” He shrieked in unbridled delight at this last part. I cover my

ears, trembling away from the bookshelves. Thomas and I found one bookshelf. We tore books off, and I grab one particular book. It seemed glued to the place, and the bookshelf swung open. *A secret escape!* I thought, dragging Thomas behind me. I shut the door, panting. It was much darker and colder in this new room. That was when something clicked for me about Barnaby: *he was on the spectrum*. A lot more about Barnaby made sense now; his hooting, his wing flapping, his obsession over death and partying. *He was stimming the entire time!* I realized, my stomach sinking. I can hear him singing that song that the Billie Bust Up community loves. If it wasn't happening to us, we'd be singing along too!

<https://youtu.be/uXowk-p0NyA?si=RhsLUvP6A7CP7Wxz>

## Chapter 5: Daughter!?

We started glancing around the new room that we escaped to. The walls were long, dark, musty and cold. They smelled as if all of life was sucked out of that hallway. I turned on the flashlight on my phone and the entire place was illuminated. I could see paintings of Barnaby when he was alive on the walls. I see one that got me to stop and stare. It was a picture of Barnaby when he was alive... and there was a mystery owl with her face crossed out. There was also a tiny owl whose face was also crossed out. "Holy shit." I breathed. I could see awards and things too, but they were ripped. *It's almost as if he was thrown into a rage about what he lost.* I realized. I shiver at the thought of an angry papa owl lashing out at anything living.

"I think we should not be here." Thomas replied, his voice low and coarse. We kept walking until we came across a flight of spiral stairs. "After you, 'Mother'. Don't get hurt." He teased me, since I am sometimes called "Mama Owl" by my friend group because of the wisdom I give out. I nod, clinging to the wall and climbing up. I entered the room at the top and whistled out of pure astonishment.

I can hear the sound of an organ playing. Its haunting melody drifted to my ears. I glance around the room. It was wide, spacious, and hauntingly cozy to say the least. There is a canopy bed with dark purple drapes, and the duvet covers were black with sigils sewn into it. The walls were made of stone, and there was an organ at one end of the room. We sneak inside and we froze. Barnaby was at the organ, and he was playing the melody in a very haunting manner. We crouch behind his bed, watching him. We hear him sniffing. I glance at Thomas and mouthed, *Should we say something?*

Thomas mouthed back, *No. Look!* He pointed to a childlike figure in a photo on Barnaby's organ. It looks like a photo of Barnaby's child. Her eyes were wide with adoration towards the photographer (who is probably Barnaby, but I don't know). I was a little surprised that anything would show any love towards that hell bird. We both hear him hoot almost mournfully, "Octavia! I wish your vessel would accept that we were supposed to haunt our home together!" We glance at each other, terrified. We slip out of his room with a stealth similar to that of a ninja. Unfortunately, the door slid shut behind us. We perk up our ears after the door slid shut behind us, hoping to hear the organ continue. There was silence. We quickly dove under the bed, hoping we weren't found out.

I hiss, "Do you think he heard us?"

Thomas shrugged, then we watched as Barnaby's neck stretched as if it was Silly Putty. We didn't realize that his head would join us. Our hearts were beating rapidly. Then we hear Barnaby hoot quite loudly in my ear, "Why are we hiding!? Oh-hoo-hoo-hoo-hoo!" We flinch, hitting our heads against the bed. We both yelled in terror, crawling out. Then Barnaby grabbed me. His eye got large as he stared at me closely. His smile grew in an almost sickeningly sweet way. "Via?" He asked, his voice soft. My eyes are wide with fear as he examined me closely. "OCTAVIA! I FINALLY FOUND YOU! Hoo-hoo-hoo!" He screeched, swinging me around and hugging me tightly.

“Ack! Put me down! I’m not Octavia!” I yelp. Then I turn to Thomas and yelled, “TELL LAIN AND ALIYAH THAT WE ARE DEALING WITH MORE THAN A PARTY HOST! WE ARE DEALING WITH A GRIEF CRAZY DADDY OWL!” I never thought I’d ever live to say that sentence. Thomas nodded, taking off running.

Now I was alone with Barnaby. He hugged me tightly. “Hang on, Via. I’m not going to shed that pesky mortal coil of yours yet. I have something bigger in mind for you!” He chuckled crazily after drying neon orange tears. I froze, my eyes widening. *He thinks his daughter is inside of me!* I realized. He glanced at me again, tscking. “Via, Via. My little owlet, what are you wearing?” He asked, his feathers ruffling.

“I’m not-!?” I started to protest, but he hushed me with a talon to my lip.

“No, no no. Your outfit just won’t do! It’s unbecoming of a Yenschuf to dress like some scruffy *thing off the streets!*” He told me, his voice getting a little shrill. Then he glanced at me, eyeing me up and down. He shook his head at the sight of my torn jeans, my now dirty Zombie Response Team tshirt, the turtleneck underneath looking a little dusty. He dragged me to a giant vanity mirror. He started measuring me, tscking at my waist. He snapped his fingers and my attire quickly transformed. In an instant, my jeans became black dress pants, my turtleneck became a button up shirt, and my T-shirt changed to a blue vest identical to his pink vest. There was a gem on my chest, similar to the one he wore.

“Hey! That was my favorite outfit, Barnaby!” I protested, but Barnaby silenced me again. This time he cuffed the back of my head with his wing and flicked me on the lip with his talon. “Ow!”

“Be respectful! Call me ‘Daddy.’ I insist, Octavia! I’m your father” Barnaby scolded, his plumicorn fluffed. He grew to a height of thirteen feet tall. I flinch, scared of being hit again. He hooted, shooing me to the organ. He lifted me and plopped me in the organ seat. He hooted, sighing, “Oh-hoo-hoo! I remember when you would sit right here on my lap and play around with the keys.” He gently nuzzled me. If this wasn’t terrifying, this would be adorable. He start playing the organ. It sounded like an organ cover of “Your Reality” from Doki Doki Literature Club. I sing the lyrics to that song, my voice soft. I think Barnaby heard me, since he hooted, “Oh, Via. Via, I missed you so much! I think you need to be punished for *running away from me for 100 years!*” He screeched. I flinch. “You are to stay in your room until midnight!” He hooted, his fruity voice insane. He grabbed me by the vest and warped reality.

[https://youtu.be/b2rqIlZYgok?si=LeK\\_quVHdm13NOod](https://youtu.be/b2rqIlZYgok?si=LeK_quVHdm13NOod)

My vision blurred as I find myself in another room. It was like a little girl’s room. There was a canopy bed with faded white drapes and everything was too frilly. I felt like throwing up. I have liked a girly girl room as a child, but as an adult I found that sort of thing off putting. I glance outside, noticing my friends got out safely. I text, “I’m trapped. Run away. Get help. Daddy Ghost Owl has gone berserk and called me Octavia!” I hit send, then I shove my phone in my pocket. I start pacing, panicking. The room itself was kind of dusty. I’m going to have to bitch at Barnaby later about dusting this place.

I hear a new voice chirp, “Hello, Octavia!” I turn to see an orange ghost in my room. He was round, orange and glowed. “I’m Timothy. Your father sent me to watch over you.” He added. “So, Octavia. Do you know how happy your father is that you returned home?” He asked, circling me. “He is hooting with joy over your return!”

“I’m not Octavia. I’m Alison!” I protested.

The ghost frowned, scowling. “No, no. That’s the name of your vessel. Your soul is of Barnaby’s daughter. He has been searching for you for a long time, sweet little Octavia!” He shot back. I bite back a groan. “Octavia. The significance of tonight is to celebrate your long awaited return... and your birthday!” Timothy purred, circling me. I froze, my face paling. Everything was falling into place, and the conclusion I drew up is not a pleasant one: Barnaby thinks my soul is that of his dead daughter.

## Chapter 6: Uh Oh... Barnaby's Mad

I start looking around for secrets. I knew that when I was a kid, I loved tiny secrets in houses. I remember looking around my mom's friend's workplace, finding secret caches from the Runaway Railroad and other secret places. I start feeling around, looking for a way out. I stride over to the wardrobe. I gently feel around the inside. It had little girl dresses hanging... old little girl dresses that faded with age.

I felt around inside and my hand rested on a piece of metal on the wall of the wardrobe. "Huh?" I quickly felt around more and found a metal hatch in the wall. *Is this an escape!?* I felt hope blossom in my chest as I opened the hatch in the wall. I crawl through the crawl space. I was brimming with curiosity and hope. *Maybe I can get out of this alive!* I was being sadistically optimistic. The crawl space was a little dusty and definitely not big enough for a five-foot-five autistic woman like me to stand up in. I crawled to the end, where there was another door. I opened it, only to be sorely disappointed from what I saw.

It was a play area. There was a dusty slide, a dilapidated tire swing from the 1920s, what I assume is a sandbox that is full of dust and spiders, and a couple of old dolls. There were no windows, the walls were painted a garish pink color, and the floor was a lilac color. I assume it was originally a brilliant shade of purple and the pink was not so garish in its heyday, but now it looks like the liveliness was sucked out of it. I see a drawer on one end. I open the drawers. I found puzzles, books, a game of Cat and Mouse, a diary... *A diary!?* *Maybe this can help me!* I figured, deciding to read it. I grab it and settle down. The sight must be strange to onlookers: a twenty three year old human dressed like a blue color swap of a certain ghost owl sitting inside of a one hundred year old play area that looked to be designed specifically for owls... reading a diary.

I sit down and read the diary:

*Dear diary, today Daddy took me outside to play, since he was working on making me a playground and decided we needed a break from the manor. He took me to the park. He is going to teach me how to fly! I'm excited! -Love, Octavia*

I see a hand drawn picture of two owls flying. They both look happy. I read the next entry, finding this little display of daddy favoritism adorable as a fellow daddy's girl myself.

*Dear diary, today, Daddy stopped his work to help me with a skinned knee I got on the swing. He told me that this is simply how gravity works. I know that it was dangerous what he was doing researching magic, but he was looking at some pretty gem. It was pretty, but Daddy said never to touch it. -Love, Octavia.*

I noticed that there were only these two entries. *Via must have died shortly after.* I realized. I can't find any other clues, but that handwriting looked just like mine... from when I was five. *What the fuck happened!?* I wondered, panicking. I text my group chat, *BAIL!*

<https://youtu.be/i7jHEJRrVs?si=l7ajRvRUyI0PqPCM>

Nothing happened. I look carefully at my phone: no signal. *Guess being a ghost means that you don't need internet.* I huff angrily at myself. Then I hear Timothy calling. I froze as he flew in here.

His round face was twisted in a mask of anger. "Baron Barnaby thought you ran away! You are still grounded, Via!" He scolded. He added, noting my confusion, "You found your old play room. Baron Barnaby remembers building you this. He was originally hoping that you would arrive when your vessel was five years old." I froze as Timothy flew out, yelling, "*BARON BARNABY! I FOUND YOUR DAUGHTER!*" I bit back a groan of frustration.

I finally snapped when Timothy yelled that. I follow him, closing the door carefully behind me. I hiss waspishly at the orange ghost, "Who died and made you my babysitter? Who died and made Barnaby my dad!?" I didn't expect Timothy to hear. I most certainly did not expect Timothy to answer. He abruptly stopped, causing me to collide with him... going right through him. I fell face first. "Ghosts. Right." I wheeze, disheveled.

"Excuse you! I happened to die in a fun way! Rude! Baron Barnaby is definitely going to love to hear what you have to say about him, Octavia!" Timothy huffed, about to flit towards the locked door.

"Wait! How did you die!?" I yell-ask, reaching to stop Timothy before realizing it was useless.

"I danced so hard I broke my spleen." He huffed back. Then he flew off before I could stop him. I ram against the door, kicking it hard. "Your father would love to hear what you had to say about both him and I!" Timothy laughed, flying away.

I did everything I could to get the fuck out. I start banging on the door, then I gave up. I flop on the bed, tears streaking my face. *This is a horrible way to die.* I sob to myself. *Having a delusional ghost owl kill you just for getting frustrated.* I start nodding off just as I heard Timothy return. "Octavia, your father wants an *audience* with you. He doesn't take kindly to having his pretties disrespected. This is your first lesson: never disrespect a Barnaboo." Timothy spat, flying close to my face.

I flinch, terrified. I stood up as the door unlocked. "Sounds like my ticket out of this jail is here." I hissed. Timothy stopped me with a glare. If something so cute can be terrifying, Barnaby and his Barnabois definitely take the cake. I open the door, only to be met with a faceful of black feathers. "Ack!" I yelp as I got a wing to the face. I growl in frustration as I was knocked back. I stand... only to find myself face-to-beak with Barnaby.

"Mind telling me what you said?" Barnaby asked, his voice raising to almost shrill pitches. He shoved me onto the bed with a powerful wing and I flinched, scared. He raised his voice, shouting, "I did not bring you up to be disrespectful!" I cover my ears, trembling. I hate loud noises, since they tend to cause me to get a headache. But how I end up liking modern rock, alt and pop is beyond me.

I've had enough. I screamed, my voice equally shrill and upset, "*I'M SORRY FOR ASKING A RHETORICAL QUESTION! THAT WAS NOT MEANT AS DISRESPECT! I WON'T ASK*

*ANY MORE QUESTIONS! ESPECIALLY NOT QUESTIONS THAT ARE RHETORICAL!”* I cover my mouth, flinching at my own voice.

<https://youtu.be/mwzHGbFNW1I?si=YAsD0kzWd4R33Qar>

I duck, trembling. I was expecting to be shanked or even hit. I lay face down on the carpeted floor, squeezing my eyes shut and waiting for the blow. *You went and did it again, Ali.* I told myself harshly as I expected to be hit. *You opened your mouth and let out verbal garbage again.*

I let tears slide down my face, and I silently count my heartbeats, trying to figure out which one will be my last one. I keep my eyes squeezed shut. I expected to feel talons cruelly ripping at my back. I expected a lot of pain. I braced myself for the one quick talon flick that will tear my back to shreds. My muscles are tense, ready for the pain. I end up getting surprised instead.

Instead of a merciless talon to the back, I felt a talon grip me firmly and lift me by the ankle. I trembled, scared. I cross my arms over my chest to protect myself. I silently waited for the talon to shred me. A solid minute passed... nothing happened. Instead, I feel a giant bird talon wrap itself around me and flip me to an upright position. I dare to open my eyes a crack. Barnaby was holding me really close to his face. His expression softened a lot. He tilted his head as he softened his voice. “You didn’t know better, Via.” He hooted softly, gently wiping my frightened tears away.

## Chapter 7: An Emotional Punch to the Gut

I froze, not quite expecting this strange and sudden flip in behavior. He somehow went from an aggressive pissed off ghost owl to a cinnamon roll with too much affection in the blink of an eye. If my friends saw this, it would have ended badly for everyone. He gazed down at me, his glowing orange eyes casting a gentle glow on my face. His expression was soft, then he coughed into his wing in almost an embarrassed manner. “Well... hoo-hoo... you’re still going to be punished.” He hooted, fluffing his feathers. All of the color seemed to have drained from my face. I gawk at him, terrified. “Hm... killing you before the event would just be rewarding bad behavior... AH-HA! I know exactly how to punish you! I’m going in!” Barnaby cackled maniacally, forcing my jaw open. I felt something akin to having helium pushed in my body. I collapsed to the ground, dizzy as that wicked ghost owl slid into my body.

I briefly black out, only waking up when the talon that was forcibly holding my jaw open slid inside. I shake my head, trying to get my bearings. Barnaby is nowhere to be seen. *Huh!? Where’d that slippery son of a-!?* I began wondering, but I was interrupted by a new voice.

*Ah-ah-ah, my sweet little owlet. Language.* I hear a new voice say in my head. It was terrifying and familiar. I glance around frantically, running to a mirror. I froze in horror at what I saw. I saw that my skin was black, my eyes were a startling shade of orange with yellow sclera and my vest changed from blue to hot pink. I was wearing a matching bowtie. I open my mouth to say something only to find the inside of my mouth yellow. *Now that I am possessing you, I can clearly see your soul, Alison... or should I say, Octavia Yenschuf? You’re going to be perfect tonight, darling. I will free you from that dreadful vessel that calls itself Alison May Black. She tried to hide you, stifle you. Daddy’s here, Octavia.* I hear Barnaby mock. This was way too overstimulating for me, so I started pacing frantically, patting my face and trying to pull my hair. *Welcome home, Octavia.* I hear Barnaby hoot with a seeming smugness.

I start walking the halls and I find myself face to face with David. I tried to warn him, “Dave!” But my voice sounded weird. It sounded as if Barnaby’s voice and my voice molded together, like two people speaking from the same mouth. Dave narrowed his eyes, instantly aware of the situation. He immediately tried to pin me down, a classic move. I dodge, only to have him pin me against a wall. The sensation was unpleasant to say the least. I feel dizzy as Barnaby forcibly takes over my body. I gripped his hand and flipped him, even though the movement was jerky, sloppy, almost as if I was a puppet on a string. “Silly mortal! You have zero idea of what you are messing with!” His voice nearly drowned out my own. *It’s okay, my sweet. I’ll protect you with all of my strength. You’re my darling owlet. I will not let some silly boy hurt you, my sweet owlet.* Barnaby crooned in my mind, and I felt something chilly gently stroke my love endorphins in my brain. I shiver. That momentary distraction earned me a punch to the jaw. “*Oh, you stupid mortal. You have no idea you are dealing with a master hunter!*” Barnaby screeched with my mouth. He immediately puppeteered my body to do some karate moves.

I silently pleaded, *Barnaby, stop! My brother is misguided! Don’t hurt him!*

*My sweet, naive owlet. He is not your brother. You were an only daughter, my personal favorite. This is just a foolish mortal trespasser.* Barnaby responded sternly as he kept making me fight my brother. Tears poured down my eyes as I was forced to fight my brother. I can sort of see my little friend group to one side, hiding and watching this go down. Lain screamed, “ALI! YOU’RE STRONGER THAN THIS! FIGHT BARNABY! NOT YOUR BROTHER!”

Aliyah shouted, “ALI! WE BELIEVE IN YOU!”

My brother screamed, “*GET OUT OF MY KID SISTER! NOBODY PICKS ON MY SISTER EXCEPT FOR ME!*” He dodged several of the moves that my possessed state delivered. My possessed state got a few successful hits, including one right to the dick (how Barnaby knew that was a human weakness... I will never know and that will remain a mystery to solve elsewhere). David finally got the upper hand, delivering an uppercut. I black out, unaware that the punch would knock Barnaby free from my body. My ears rang, and Barnaby was flying out of my body like a black waterfall. I dizzily get to my feet, coughing up blood and feathers. My friends ran out and grabbed me, pulling me away.

I noticed that Thomas was completely absent. I croak weakly, “Where...? Where’s Thomas?” I felt very dizzy and in pain. I’ll have to assess the damage later. *Goddamn it, Dave. That was not the time to play hero or badass Marine!* I silently cursed my brother as we ran away. It was six AM, the time the party was supposed to end... *Ghosts are weak in sunlight!* I hoped as we ran outside. We made it outside... only to be completely surrounded by angry Barnaboos. I look around, dismayed. Imagine a bunch of angry orange Boos looking at you. That’s exactly what angry Barnaboos staring at you angrily looks like.

I can hear Barnaby cackling like the insane murder bird he is right before I hear a female voice yell, “ARISTOTLE! DOWN THERE! IN FRONT OF THE MANOR!” I glance up to see the strangest sight. Thomas was riding a flying umbrella. But with him was another passenger, what appeared to be a light purple goat. Her bell gleamed in the gray dawn, and we can see what appeared to be a pink axolotl flying next to her. The 8 on his head glowed as he tossed a rope. I grab the rope along with my brother and my friends. I watched as the goat yelled, “BARNABY! PLEASE!” Then she flew away with Lain and Aliyah. I felt my brother’s strong arms wrap around me right before he threw me at the axolotl.

I was about to grab my brother when I heard something like someone being stabbed. Dave froze, his eyes widening. He glanced down at his fatigues, which were stained with blood. He stared at me, then down again. He gingerly touched the growing red stain in his military fatigues. “Alison, go home and tell Mom I died bravely.” He said, collapsing to his knees. The color drained from his face as he fell down. “I see Daddy... My time is here.” He rasped, before he took his last breath and said this, “Tell Mommy and my girlfriend I died protecting you. I love you, Alison May Black.” Then his eyes stared past me as I flew away, forever staring at nothing. His face was permanently etched in a small smile as the color and life slowly vanished. Barnaby was laughing as my brother stared at me... and my brother was never going to be blinking again, or teasing me again... or breathing... or loving.

I know that David was an asshole, but he was still my brother. I loved my brother even if he is a stubborn asshole sometimes. Memories of David and I roughhousing together came

flooding back, memories of us teasing each other, and one memory of him getting me out of a swamp when I was seven stained my eyes with tears. I had zero idea what to tell my brother's girlfriend, since "Sorry my brother died to protect me from a murderous ghost bird" is going to sound insincere. I know that I can never forgive myself or that horrible ghost owl for this. I screamed at the top of my lungs as we flew away, "*DAVID!*" I was in hysterics as we flew out of that dreadful pocket dimension. "We have to go back!" I begged the axolotl. "We have to bring him home! Please!"

"Alison, is it? We can't go back to the pocket dimension to retrieve your brother." The axolotl had a wise, plummy voice to him, but I caught traces of sadness. I tried to argue, but he silenced me with a golden bubble to my mouth... which left me letting out muffled screaming in vain. "Alison, I'm sorry. Your brother is dead. He died saving you. I saw him throw you to me right as Barnaby's rusty knife stabbed him."

## Chapter 8: Remorseful Terror

Once we flew to safety outside of that horrible pocket dimension, I was a total wreck of a human girl. I had somehow broken loose from that bubble, screaming and swearing at anyone close by who was willing to listen. Soon everyone ignored me, opting to wait until we landed. I tried to run back to that manor to get my brother away from that awful place, but I was grabbed roughly by both Aliyah and Lain. I wail, “WE HAVE TO GO BACK! HE NEEDS US!” They stopped me, hugging me tightly. I was broken down to a sobbing, screaming mess, a rarity that does not happen publicly often. I felt as if someone had stabbed me in the heart with a stinging nettle. I knew that I am David’s only family in this area and that I had to organize a memorial gathering. I was broken in tears as I started writing his memoir on my phone. I typed out what I planned on saying about my brother, tears stinging my eyes.

The purple goat from earlier sat next to me. “Whatcha doing?” She asked, reading over my shoulder. I nearly elbowed her in the face for that. “Hey! I was chased by pirates, puppets and ghosts! Let me read it!” She protested, trying to reach for me. I stop her with yet another gentle elbow.

“Billie! Leave her alone! She’s going through a rough time since the poor little thing has just lost her brother!” The axolotl scolded. He gently patted me on the back. “I’m so sorry for your loss, Alison.” He added in a much gentler tone. I started looking for the perfect way to remember my brother. I sob as I remembered that I was far from home. The axolotl patted my back to try to calm me down, rubbing me gently.

“Ali, I have something for you.” I hear Thomas say softly. I turn to look at him, only to see him holding a folded up United States flag. “We were originally going to burn this for you in the off chance that you died by his hand, but we decided that it was better to have a funeral pyre for your brother.” He said as tears fogged my glasses. I hug Thomas tightly. I was sobbing brokenly in Thomas’s arms.

That night was the night we had his funeral pyre. We gathered around the empty coffin (a total insult to his burial, but Aristotle made it clear as day that I’m not allowed to retrieve the body), and I started the eulogy. “David Thomas Black was an honorable Marine, a goofball of a brother, a loyal friend, and...” I started strong, but that quickly broke down with me reminiscing about my childhood with him, breaking down into a mangled mess. “He was the best friend and the one enemy I did not want to see die!” I finally shriek, falling to the ground, screaming and throwing a hissy fit. “*IT WAS NOT FAIR THAT HE DIED BECAUSE OF ME! HE SHOULD HAVE LIVED A LONG, HAPPY LIFE AND SETTLED DOWN WITH HIS LOVING GIRLFRIEND! I SHOULD HAVE BEEN THE ONE THAT DIED!*” I screamed, rocking really hard and flapping my hands in agitation. I was unaware that I was performing yet another maladaptive behavior and throwing a hissy fit even though I was right: it should have been me who had died and not my brother.

I forced myself to breathe, realizing that I was using maladaptive behavior. Then I righted myself by standing. I saw the empty coffin mock me. I placed a handful of flowers that I’d

picked earlier on the coffin. Then I start building the kindling. Thomas hands me the flag, his face solemn. I look up, and I say to God, “Blessed are you, Adonai, our God, creator of the universe... Please make sure David gets home to the pearly gates. I’m blessed and thankful that he saved my life, and I ask for him to be reunited with my dad.” My throat sounded tight with emotion, and I got no answer from God aside from a gentle breeze. Then I started reciting the pledge of allegiance as I placed the flag onto the coffin and set it on fire. The whole coffin burned. I drew on my skin intricate designs, and in the open spaces, I wrote the day the dead loved ones I had were born and died. I was sobbing as I wrote David’s birth and death date.

The axolotl (Who I learned is Aristotle), placed a hand on my shoulder. “Alison, it’s okay to be sad. But I think you need something more than to be alone. And writing on your skin is bad for you. When all is said and done, we’ll get markings done for you. Permanent ones.”

I stood, and I turned to sing. I sang the most heart wrenching song that I could think of to make my grief known. I sang “Death” by Melanie Martinez, my voice and lip trembling as I sang. Then I paused and realized that this was inappropriate for David, that he needs something he likes. So, I sang “In My Life” by the Beatles. My friends joined in. Our voices rang in the night, even though it would have sounded much better if David was here. It was heart wrenching to those who are in the know. Then I hear something that I never thought was possible. I hear David’s voice join in with us. I whip my head around to see if I was just having a bad dream.

[https://youtu.be/yFfsM\\_6eYaE?si=2sdwHbPG-1Mz91V4](https://youtu.be/yFfsM_6eYaE?si=2sdwHbPG-1Mz91V4)

<https://youtu.be/YBcdt6DsLQA?si=fNcoBHDHV9ee0KBD>

All I saw was a Barnaboo wearing a military hat. He said in David’s voice (a total punch to the gut for me), “Octavia, Baron Barnaby wants you to come home. His party starts soon.” He placed a black envelope on my lap. There was Barnaby’s telltale symbol on the address: an outline of his head. I sob, placing my head between my knees and rocking again. Aliyah grabbed the invitation and burned it, glaring. “Barnaby is going to lose it.” David grumbled, flying away.

I screamed back, “He lost it ages ago!” David didn’t answer. He was gone. I shake my head. “David could not have saved my life just to betray me!” I tried to stutter, but there was no denying it: David is now just a messenger ghost for Barnaby. I sob, trying to wipe my tears. “That can’t be David! It can’t be! David would never betray me like this!” I was in complete denial over David’s death and afterlife.

I watch as David just vanished like the two faced Barnaboo he is. “I’m really starting to think that all ghosts are Gemini by nature. They are all two faced the minute they die.” Lain commented, their brow furrowed in rage. “Your brother just threw you under the bus.”

“Hmph. Guess being dead means that you immediately become a traitor to everyone who you have loved.” I grumbled bitterly as I tried to wipe my tears away. I couldn’t look at the burning pyre a minute longer, so Aristotle took me to a bar (Which was not a good idea, but he was trying his best to comfort me in an emotionally distressing time). When I tried to point out that I don’t have a means to pay and that it was not a good idea to get drunk and

emotional at the same time, he hushed me and handed me a butter rum shot. I downed that easily, now really buzzed. He got me three more, and I was drunk.

After singing a few shanties, songs that I knew David liked and reminiscing about David's most funny mishaps, I spotted a stranger wearing a black hood. I drunkenly stumble over to the stranger, unaware that the red flags were present. I drunkenly start reminiscing about my past and my brother to the stranger, who nodded enthusiastically. I didn't notice that the stranger's cloak was hot pink with white skulls sewn on the bottom, nor did I see the orange gem glowing like a stop light. I feel the stranger hug me as I drunkenly ramble. Only when the stranger wrapped his wings around me and closed the cloak around me was when I realized my deadly mistake. I look up to see the unmistakable pair of swirling golden eyes gazing at me and the beaked mouth grinning with sinister intent. I screamed, breaking loose from the stranger and drunkenly stumble to Aristotle. "Via, do not talk to strangers!" Barnaby scolded as he tried to stop me.

"ARISTOTLE! ARISTOTLE! MY BROTHER'S KILLER! *HE'S HERE!*" I screamed drunkenly. Barnaby tried to stop me by wrapping me in his cloak, revealing his black feathers and physique. That didn't stop me. Instead, it made me more scared.

## Chapter 9: A Dangerous Return Home

Aristotle looked over at me, and his expression changed from “chill dad” to “oh fuck” in two seconds flat. I dove for Aristotle, narrowly avoiding the pink cape from tangling into me and also narrowly avoiding getting kidnapped by my brother’s killer. Aristotle’s pink face shone with worry as I smacked my head against the rail. He put his cape on my shoulders and ushered me outside. I ran drunkenly over to Billie, my words slurring, “The ghost owl’s here! Run!” Billie raced over to me and dragged me away. “Aristotle, be careful!” I whimper. I turn around to see Barnaby staring at us. More like... staring at Billie.

“Get away from my daughter, goat.” He hissed, his wings raised in a threatening way. I have seen way too many owl videos online to know that he is getting in position to attack. His orange eyes are narrowed in hatred as he poised himself for an attack.

“Yanno this evil bastard!?” I ask, my drunkenness apparent.

Billie pulled me away into a giant purple tent, yelling, “Yeah! This ain’t my first rodeo with Barnaby and it sure as heck ain’t going to be my last!” I sob as we ran into the giant tent. Billie and I both hide under the desk. We hear a sound akin to feathers being dragged on the floor. I hug Billie tightly, scared for my life. Then I hear the unmistakable sound of Barnaby hooting. I close my eyes tightly, waiting for the worst.

I feel something caress my back. I know it was Billie. I opened my eyes, surprised that I was not killed. I peek out and nearly bit back screams of rage. Barnaby’s back was turned to us, and he was reading one of Aristotle’s necromancy books. I yell, finally having enough, “Hey you! Pick on someone your own size!” I stormed over, ready to rip that wicked thing a new asshole and I froze. I realized that he must be thinking that I was fixing to meet Jesus... or end up in his party as an angry guest. I glanced up, realizing that he was using his feet as fingers, reading the book easily. He stopped what he was doing, his gaze turned threateningly towards me. I glare back drunkenly. Then Barnaby stretched his neck to my level and stared me dead in the eyes. I felt a little woozy so I fell over backwards. That was when Barnaby decided to go into Papa Owl mode... again. This time, he spread his wings over me as a form of a blanket, hooting in disapproval.

“Octavia, you are too drunk to be acting like that blasted goat. We’re going home to the manor, and I will have a discussion with you about your behavior.” He grumbled, his black feathers fluffing in annoyance. He held me close just as Aristotle came charging in. He froze as he found Barnaby wrapping himself around me. “How could you let this happen!? My little owlet is drunk off her-!?” Barnaby snapped, his bowtie spinning in agitation just before he got interrupted by my own drunken scream.

I decided to intervene, “Wasn’t his fault, you asshole! *YOU KILLED MY BROTHER!*” I shrieked the last part drunkenly. Everyone was silent. Except for Barnaby, who hooted in indignation. I continued yelling at Barnaby while I was still drunk as hell, “You didn’t watch him grow up next to me! You didn’t wrestle with him. You never pulled me out of a swamp when I was seven! You only tormented me! And my brother had a loving girlfriend at home

that I have to break the bad news with!” I made my voice venomous, “And the worst part is that he died to keep me from getting hurt by your feathered ass!” Looking back, yelling at Barnaby was not a good option.

I watched as his smile vanished, replaced with a scowl. I realized that I went too far with my tongue lashing. “Via... I spent *ONE HUNDRED YEARS LOOKING FOR YOU AND I FINALLY FOUND YOU! AND THIS IS HOW YOU THANK ME!? I NEVER STOPPED LOOKING EVEN IF I WAS PARTYING IN THE AFTERLIFE! YOU DON'T KNOW HOW OFTEN I LOOKED FOR YOU!*” Barnaby screeched this, causing everyone to fall silent. I didn't realize that a black portal appeared, with one of Barnaby's hands showing up and grabbing me by the hair. I scream, letting out a wail similar to a siren. He walked out, all eleven feet of scariness, and his talon pulled me harshly by the ear. I try to break loose, screaming and crying.

“LET ME GO!” I screamed, in pain and drunk.

Barnaby leaned down again to give me a sharp glare, which is very terrifying if you consider that his orange eyes glow in the dark. “Via. I'm going to punish you once you sober up. You've run away from home yet again, you're drunk, and you have disrespected me. I will not be as kind as last time.” Barnaby's voice was cold, soft, and harsh. There was no fruitiness detected. “This is very serious business that you found yourself in.” He added, puffing his feathers in unsaid agitation. That just made him more horrifying to look at.

I was too drunk to let that sink in. I tried to slap his talon away. That earned me a painful yank by the hair. Then I was yanked into swirling darkness. I nearly vomited as the colors swirled around me. Everything was blurry for a few minutes, and I felt sick. I felt like I was being flung around, bumping into whatever solid objects Barnaby could muster. By the time it was over, I was mildly battered. It took me a few minutes to recognize where I am. My heart sank.

I was in Barnaby's bedroom again. He sat me down on his bed hard. “Oof!” I grunt. I'm going to have a bad hangover in the morning... assuming Barnaby even bothers letting me live that long. I start fidgeting with my hair, crying softly as I begin to think of my brother. “That was unfair what you did to my brother.” I grumbled drunkenly. “He was fresh from the military, close to marrying his girlfriend, and you ripped that away from him. That's why I'm drunk and upset.”

Barnaby silenced me with a glare. He whispered in my ear, moving a strand of my unkempt brown hair to the side, “Via, you don't have siblings.”

“My name is Alison, asshole!” I hiss back. “I have... had three siblings and now I'm down to two sisters! And you are *not* laying a talon on them!” I found myself pinned by the throat on the bed. It must have taken a lot of self control for Barnaby not to kill me outright. I cough, trying to break loose.

“Via, I don't want to stress how long I spent looking for you! But you listen close: *my manor, my rules. Do not question me again. I only wish for what's best for you.*” That awful bird purred in my ear, letting go of my throat. He glanced at me again, noticing my disheveled appearance. “Tonight, I will bring you home, Via. It will be a grand event celebrating your

return.” Barnaby was taking a much more sinister approach as he circled me. He stroked my now messy hair, shaking his head at me. “Timothy will get you cleaned up. You look terrible.” He added, flashing some sharp teeth at me.

I run a hand through my hair, glaring at him. My hazel eyes are now slits of anger. “Gee, thanks for reminding me that I’m not doing well.” I grumbled.

That mouthy comment had Barnaby looking closer, squinting at me. I knew that he could see the bruises, the dark circles under my eyes, my untidy appearance due to grief. “Oh, my. You must have cared a lot about that military Barnaboo.” He commented. He stood up straight... all eleven feet of him. “Well, Octavia. Think of it this way: you won’t be separated from Dave again.” He purred, patting my head again. He snapped his talons, causing my hair to tidy itself and my clothes changed once more into sleek dress pants, a pink waistcoat and bowtie, and a crisp shirt. He was holding something glowing in his talon, examining it. Then he looked at me, sticking his tongue out.

“Get some rest, Via.” He ordered, cupping my face with his talon. I gaze up, this time he looked like he genuinely cared. I knew better than to believe that. I still have a scar from the last time I believed him. I repress the urge to pat his feathered cheek. I don’t think he would take kindly to that. I scurry off to the room. It was much cleaner now, and I see a door in the center that looks like my bedroom closet door... “Home?” I whisper.

Then I felt my watch on my wrist hum. A crackling voice is heard, “Ali? Are you there?” I recognized the voice.

“Aristotle! How did you get in my watch!?” I hiss.

“Doesn’t matter. I found a way for you to get home. I already sent your friends home. Walk through the door and don’t look back.” Aristotle ordered. I open the closet door, seeing my messy room on the other side. I slip through and close the door.

The last thing I hear is Timothy yelling, “Baron Barnaby! Your daughter ran off again!”

Then there was silence from my closet. I knew where I was: Norwich, CT. *I’m home!* I realized, squealing happily. Then I remember that Dave is dead and that I need to break the bad news.

## Chapter 10: A Memory Gathering to Remember... For the Wrong Reasons

I spend hours pacing the floor of my house, tears in my eyes as I remembered how Dave threw his life away to save me and trying to figure out a believable story to tell at his memorial gathering that I was going to host. *He should be in Heaven with Dad! Not at Barnaby's party!* I lament to myself. I scream aloud to the silence of my house, “*IT'S NOT FAIR!*” I was really having a bad meltdown, sobbing and pacing the floor. I sit on the ground, tears in my hazel eyes. I felt as if I was crushed into a million tiny pieces.

Norwich was quiet... naturally. It's dark outside. I head into my brother's room, and a huge wave of sadness hits me. His bed was messily made as if he had recently got out of bed, his books are on his tiny, dilapidated bookshelf, and the room feels as if David was about to march into his room at any moment. My throat tightened as I spot my brother's laptop. I remember how we promised each other to watch *Hazbin Hotel* together. I knew better. Nobody is ever going to enter this room again, I will never hear him play his guitar again, and there's going to be silence instead of the sound of video games being played.

I start softly crying, sitting myself on his bed. I was so gripped with emotions that I couldn't bear to get out of his room. I spent the next day curled up on his bed, a sobbing mess. I didn't have the strength or the money for a proper funeral. So I use Dave's social media account to tell everyone what had happened. I start cleaning my house deeply, cracking every time I hear a Beatles song on the radio. I was alone in my grief, barely hanging on mentally.

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I cleaned the entire house deeply, top to bottom. It took four days. The day of the gathering arrived. Friends of Dave's, family, even my sister from England came over. I told the family part of the truth because I don't think they're going to believe me if I said an eleven foot tall ghost owl killed my brother. Instead, I made it sound like he pushed me out of the way of a falling tree while we were out bonding with each other.

The atmosphere was hushed save for the sound of my kid cousins playing. My mom finally arrived. When she found out that David died to save me, she was terse. She refused to look at me, refused to believe that David was dead. That was... until the worst thing happened. My mother looked me in the eye and asked, “Pud, you are not being honest! How did he really die? How did my son die!?” I hesitated, unsure of how to tell Mom that a ghost owl killed him. That hesitation earned me a sharp shoulder shaking. “Ali May! You better start talking! If David is dead, then where is his body!?” She shrieked.

I scream back, “YOU FUCKING, HYPOCRITICAL BITCH! I SAW HIM DIE!”

“THAT'S NOT GOOD ENOUGH!” She screamed back.

“I THOUGHT YOU WERE MY MOTHER! CLEARLY NOT! YOU WERE NOT THERE! I CAN'T RETRIEVE MY BROTHER'S BODY EVEN IF I WANTED TO!” I screamed

loudly enough to cause the whole gathering to screech to a halt. I didn't realize that Barnaby was right behind me. Everyone stared at me with shock and horror. "WHERE THE FUCK WERE YOU WHEN DAD DIED OF LUNG CANCER!?" I kept screaming at her, unaware that Barnaby was listening in. "YOU INVITED THOSE FUCKERS WHO YOU CLAIM ARE YOUR FAMILY INTO THIS FUCKING HOUSE... TWICE! THAT WENT AGAINST DAD'S WISHES! I INVITED YOU AND EMILY OVER BECAUSE I NEEDED MY *FAMILY! BUT APPARENTLY, MY FAMILY DIED WITH DAD !*" Everyone was silently staring at me.

[\(This song is used to show exactly what Ali's mom is\)](#)

Mom was finally silent. Everyone started slowly backing away from me. Emily was stunned that I finally called her out publicly. Then I realized that they were staring at something behind me. I turn around slowly. *Fuck me*. That was the only thought in my mind.

Barnaby was standing behind me, grinning maniacally and having his tongue stick out of his beak. "Ooh, I love a good drama! Continue!" He exclaimed, hooting happily.

I went from unhappy to pissed in the span of a few minutes. "Everyone in this fucking shit hole of a childhood home is here because-!" I began angrily. Barnaby cut me off by putting his foot over my mouth. *Gross!* I thought as he covered it.

"Because I killed someone you cared about?" He finished my sentence shamelessly, hooting and giggling like the murder bird he is. Everyone was talking among themselves. Then he threw something on the backyard. I wail as I recognize David's dead body in his military fatigues, still bloody and torn. My mom stared in shock. Then all hell broke loose. Everyone ran away from the gathering, except my mother. She grabbed my brother's body and ran off. There were screams, shouts, kids sobbing, and everyone left in the span of two minutes. The backyard was trashed. I sink to my knees.

I felt a giant wing try to envelope me. "**You.**" I snarl, kicking and trying to tear at feathers. He gripped my throat as he lifted me to eye level. I cough, angry.

Barnaby is looking smug as he made me look at him. He hooted, "I know something that you don't know~!" He hooted, flapping his wings happily. I felt crushed inside. But I try to put on a brave face. I was now alone with the bird. I stare at his glowing orange eyes and felt pissed. Barnaby pulled me close, his black ear feathers laid back as he whispered in my ear, "That woman you called your mother doesn't love you." He chuckled crazily at that. I froze. My face paled, since my relationship with my mother has been a sore subject. "I watched you from the shadows. How you always hold back stimming from your mother, how she told you that stimming is bad. She basically denied you happiness." He chuckled as he put me down. "And that boy you called a brother started picking up on this habit and beat you up when you stim too loud. The one person who you saw as a real father was the only one who loved you for you." He whispered. He nuzzled my cheek, causing me to exclaim aloud in disgust.

"You killed him. Even though he did things he thought was right, he was still someone I truly gave a shit about at the end of the day. You are a heartless bastard for taking that from me. He may have been an asshole, but-" I tried to defend my brother. If you want me to lie and say

that Barnaby was silent and remorseful about it, then just put this fanfic down and picture that. But we all know that I suck at lying, so I might as well rip the bandaid off for you.

Barnaby hooted crazily, slapping his knee with a wing as if I said something truly hilarious. “We both know that he did not care about the real you, Via!” He snickered, preening his feathers to hide his laughter. “He and that wretch of a mother only cared about the you that *you* project! He cared about that flimsy mask, just like your mother! I know the real you, sweetheart!” He hooted.

I groan as I sit on the patio, sobbing again. I hate admitting this but he was right. My mom and brother only cared about the me that I present myself to the world, a smartass with a heart of gold. They didn’t even care about the me that I had hidden: an autistic girl who really wanted to be loved for who she is, stims and all.

Chapter 11: Shit Got Real

Chapter by [Thanatophobia \(PuddieBlackCat\)](#)

I was alone with Barnaby now that everyone had bailed from my brother's memorial gathering. I know what you're thinking, "Alison! That's a bad idea! He will kill you!" Yada, yada. But right now, I was too emotionally fucked up to think straight. I sat on the patio, my face cupped in my hands. I sat on the patio chair, very unhappy with how this gathering was.

This memory gathering has gone down shit creek without a paddle. I thought miserably, feeling way too heavy to continue standing. He glanced around my now trashed backyard. The bleeding hearts my dad loved were trampled, tables were turned or broken, and the area where my brother's picture was... I don't dare look at it. I didn't want to see the broken glass, the smashed picture frame, none of this.

I lay my head in my arms, grumbling to myself, "Why? Why do things always go wrong with me?" Tears welled in my eyes as I sat among the chaos, sinking to my knees on the ground like some pathetic loser. "Why does God hate me!?" My lip trembled as I asked this damning question. My voice threatened to crack when I asked this question. I didn't notice that Barnaby's expression shifted to something akin to intrigue.

I didn't notice Barnaby making his way over to me with a piece of cake in hand... in foot? Whatever, I don't really have the strength or give a damn to be technical. He wrapped his black wings around me, laying his head on mine. "Via, I get you're upset with me for some reason, but you need to listen. Your vessel has been through mental abuse from being told not to stim. I encouraged stimming because I knew that it was a way to regulate your emotions." He purred in my ear, squeezing his really stretchy neck around me like a snake. His feathers felt oddly comforting despite the fact that they're sort of slimy and disgusting to touch.

[I sing angrily, shoving him away. I was seeing red as I screamed my frustrations and grief at that giant ghost owl.](#)

"Are you kidding me!?" I growl, my anger boiling to the surface very fast and shoving my sadness on the backburner. "My mom told me to stop stimming because she didn't want me to fail! She only wanted me to not be-!" I tried to continue but Barnaby hushed me with a foot to my mouth. I didn't dare lick his foot only because I don't know where it's been. Plus, it's gross to lick something that's been dead for over a hundred years.

"What? What's best for you? I can see her point academically, but riddle me this, darling Via; what good did it do you mentally in the long run?" Barnaby asked teasingly, tilting my head so that my tear-stricken hazel eyes were met with his gigantic, swirling, sunset orange eyes. His head was tilted at me as he asked this, using a black talon to caress my cheek like a father would with his daughter. That giant black ghost owl pressed my head against his chest, hooting softly. I nodded off on his shoulder against my better judgment. Something about his maniacal hoot was oddly calming. That was a mistake on my end. I didn't realize that he lifted me up to carry me to his dimension again.

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I wake up in that dusty little girls room. The faded pinks were looking a bit brighter. The room was dusty, and when I checked the playroom, it looked recently cleaned. I was now dressed in a hot pink waistcoat and bowtie. I look down and see that my dress pants have been cleaned up recently. I started exploring the manor, slipping out and wandering down the hexagon rugged halls.

To say that Barnaby Manor is awesome would be an understatement. It makes my house look microscopic and makes NFA look like a broom closet. Naturally it was going to make Buckingham Palace look like a child's dollhouse because apparently when you are an eleven foot tall ghost owl, you have to have a lot of room to move around. And the furniture is bigger than me. When I wanted to rest, I had to take off my old, faded, worn out boots to climb up a couch. I would rest there for a half hour, not realizing that my little exploration is going to cause Barnaby to come searching for me. I just kept exploring, unaware that Barnaby was screeching for me. That was... until he was right behind me.

I was trying to climb up a particularly high couch when I felt something wrap itself around my waist. Then I hear that fruity voice exclaim quite loudly, "There you are! I was looking everywhere for you, Via!" I yelped in terror as I was plucked from my attempt to climb and forced to stare into a pair of gigantic, bright orange eyes. Barnaby looked sort of pissed, but I cannot tell because I simply suck at reading expressions so I have to depend on other indicators to know exactly what the fuck I should be saying.

Barnaby had his swirling orange eyes fixated on me. I try to squirm loose from his grip, whimpering as I did so. That giant ghost owl was having none of that, since his grip tightened. I peek out from his wing, blinking my hazel eyes in stunned silence. I took in my surroundings, my eyes wide with terror. We were in the main party room, the walls a sickly purple color. I cling close, sucking in air through my teeth.

The room had many sigils all over the walls. Some had his name, others had death on them. In the center of the room was a giant egg. It was about half Barnaby's height... the perfect height for a certain five foot five inch tall human to fit in. It was clear, as if it was made of glass. He stroked it gently, muttering to himself. The other Barnaboos look... Excited? I cannot tell since I suck at reading expressions.

I finally ask, my voice wavering, "What's that thing?"

That wretched ghost of a bird turned to me with a grin. His bright orange tongue stuck out as he playfully tapped my head. "I will let you know when the time comes, little Via~!" He replied, his voice half singing. "I know something you don't know, darling." He hooted, hugging me close. I keep an eye out for knives or strangulation because I heard through the grapevine that he loves killing people via hugging. I yelp. I have done some research on Barnaby on Tumblr before I got pulled into his pocket dimension again. Let's just say that the stuff confirmed to be fact makes Barnaby terrifying. If I had the courage to say it, I would call Barnaby "The World's Cutest Eldritch Horror" to his face.

I realized that Barnaby might be my polar opposite. Or another variant of me. A part of me that I'd rather keep hidden... I shake my head. I return my attention to the egg. I reach out to

touch it, but I felt something big wrap around both hands. I hear giggling. I realized that Barnaby thinks that I'm probably the cutest thing since cat videos. "Not yet, Via! You will be ready... *tonight!*" He screeched the last part, and that was when I see the Barnaboos carry something. It was an hourglass, filled with bright blue sand. "Little Via, this hourglass represents us being back together as a family, darling." Barnaby purred in my ear.

My face paled. That hourglass was a timer on how much time I had left to live. I saw all of my years, and everything I planned, vanish in front of my eyes. I realized that my boyfriend would never see me again. I can't let out my despair in front of him. Then I get a text from Thomas. *Ali, you're going to hate me for bringing this to my attention but... I caught your boyfriend cheating on you.* That caused me to break. I sink to my knees and let out an anguished scream.

# Chapter 12: Astral Projection in My Sleep

Chapter by [Thanatophobia \(PuddieBlackCat\)](#)

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

I am going to stop denying it and state the truth: Someone out there really hates my guts. I don't know if it's God or some outside force that really hates people like me. Although, I don't know what I did. But here I am, knowing that my time was about to be brutally cut short by a gruesome death... by a ghost owl host. Yeah, a nasty death by a ghost owl is not something anyone wants to go through. I knew that I was fucked when he showed me that awful thing. Add in the fact that I'm Jewish, and I think I was handed a death sentence just for the crime of being born.

I paced around the dusty girl room, the threat of death literally everywhere. I remember reading about the folklore revolving around owls, and none of them are good. The only one that is okay is Athena, and unfortunately for me, Barnaby has proven himself to be very smart. All other folklore revolves around death, such as for Jews, seeing an owl is basically a sign of death. I was clearly agitated, fidgeting badly and pacing. I have noticed that he doesn't exactly mask in a traditional sense. He only masks around new guests.

I heard his voice sing a few times. It was... haunting. I also noticed that he has a lot of clocks around his manor. That would make some semblance of sense but he's dead. I observe that he has a hyperfixation on clocks. When he saw my digital watch and my phone, I could literally see hearts in his pupils as he started asking all sorts of questions, like the make and model of my watch, and he asked way too many questions about smartphones that I wasn't even sure on how to answer. I gave him my old iPhone to dissect and told him that was how I learned how things worked.

I start reflecting on his behaviors, such as singing, hooting, anything bird-like. I realized that when he flapped his wings and hooted a lot in laughter, he was basically stimming. I finally sit after three hours of pacing and agitation. I sigh, feeling... angry at Barnaby? I shook my head. I mean, I was naturally pissed at him for killing my brother. But... then I thought about how annoyed I was about the fact that he can freely hyperfixate on death, the way he laughed...

"Jealous, little Via?" I hear a familiar voice ask behind me. I nearly jumped out of my skin from shock, biting back several curse words that would probably earn me a mouth washing. "I don't blame you. If I saw someone who was allowed to be themselves, I'd show jealousy too." He continued, using a giant talon to ruffle my hair. I sit on the bed, crossing my arms. There were tears in my eyes for the past four hours I spent crying.

I didn't realize exactly how right Barnaby was. I swallowed, then forced myself to admit it. "You're right." I admitted, my face red with embarrassment. "I was jealous of you because you can just stim and be yourself without being told to stop it..." Then he grabbed my arms and

started trying to coax me to stim. I start flapping my arms, surprised that it was natural. It felt right.

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If there is one thing that I learned about Barnaby the hard way, it's that nothing escapes his notice. He glanced at me, his jack o lantern-esque face full of concern. "Little Via, why are you crying? My sweet, I will kill whoever did this." He murmured as he pulled me up by the face. He hugged me close, closing his orange eyes. He continued stroking my hair, attempting to get me to open up. I finally broke, the stress was too much to handle alone. I told the giant ghost owl everything, which was a mistake in itself. I told about my cheating boyfriend, and his orange eyes widened as if I had slapped him. Then his pupils dilated a little to show a tiny black pinprick in them. "I have something to deal with, Octavia." Barnaby noted, his black feathers puffed out. The purple outline he had definitely helped him appear threatening.

I learned later that when Barnaby dilates his eyes to black pinpricks, that is generally a sign that he was pissed. Another thing that flew over my head was the fact that his tone was flat and emotionless. He excused himself with a huff, leaving me alone with my thoughts on my impending demise. Then I closed my eyes and fell asleep.

I dreamed through someone else's point of view, which was weird. I was flying, enjoying myself and then I glanced around. I recognized the church I flew past. I had a brief glimpse at my hands.

They weren't hands. They were talons. Then I started laughing maniacally. I realized that it wasn't my laugh, since I don't hoot. I decided to just tag along for the ride. Then I flew right into my house. "Where is it?" I muttered in a masculine, fruity voice. Then I found what I was looking for... which was obscured by my vision. Then I flew out my window again, spreading my gigantic wings behind me. I took off flying, the clouds billowing below me. I took a deep inhale of air and cackled at the feeling of freedom.

Then I dive bombed down to a very familiar house... my cheating boyfriend's house. I realized that I was unarmed. I felt powerful though, which felt strange. I slipped inside of my boyfriend's home with ease and crawled silently up the stairs like a feathery bat out of hell. I enter my boyfriend's room, seeing him... talking to another girl online. I nearly vomited when I read him texting all sorts of vile things that would make a normal person curl their lip in disgust.

Then he flipped to Discord and started texting things that made me want to bleach my eyes. Instead of my heart sinking, I felt a hot rage boiling under my skin... and feathers. I slammed his laptop shut on him, whirled my ex to face me, and I hooted maniacally. "Looks like you can use a hug, Carson!" I cackled.

Carson, my cheating boyfriend, whirled around, his pudgy ass sagging over the chair. "I ain't gay, homes." He replied. He was trying to play off his cheating ways. Then I read the texts between him and his friend Sage. I noticed that Carson had dead-named her, causing me to see red. "Is Sage your little girlfriend?"

"No." Carson replied. "Sage is actually a dude. And 'her' name is Shawn!"

“You...!” I spat, feeling something sharp in my mouth. Then I whip out a water gun. I felt devious... and pissed. “Nerf or nothing!” I shrieked as I blasted his face with green water. Carson screamed as his face began melting off...

I wake up with a start, hyperventilating. Then I glance at the hourglass. It was halfway full at the bottom and the sand kept pouring, a cruel reminder that my life is going to be cut short. I can't read hourglasses. I sigh angrily, “Damn, Barnaby. Would it kill you to have a clock or a timer act as a countdown?” I start patting my face aggressively... then I felt something wrap around my wrists. I glance down at my wrists. “Huh!?”

Barnaby gripped my wrists gently. I glance at him, shocked. He asked, his voice strangely sharp, “Octavia, did you astral project?”

I flinch, shaking my head. Barnaby sighed, then asked, softer, “Did you dream about anything?” I shrug, giving zero indication. The giant black ghost owl excused himself, his tail feathers swishing behind him. I sigh in relief and wrote about my strange dream. I didn't realize that a pair of glowing orange eyes were reading over my shoulder until I finished writing and noticed that the room had a slightly orange glow.

“Wait a second... I didn't turn on the light.” I realized aloud. I glance over my shoulder to see a pair of glowing orange eyes staring at me. I yelled, Sonic the Abridgehog style, and fell off the bed in surprise.

“Hoo hoo hoo hoo hoo! Nice try, Via.” Barnaby teased, then materialized, ruffling my hair. “So,” Barnaby continued, his fruity voice full of a teasing tone, “You dreamed that you went on a hunt with me?” He asked teasingly, nudging me playfully. Then he reread the dream again, closing the dream diary and tucking it in his feathers. “My, oh my. We can't have my little Via in such an angry mindset. I think you should visit your uncle Fantoccio!” He replied, but there was something about his words that got me on edge. Almost as if he was hiding something... My eyes narrowed at this thought.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the cliff hanger back there! I was busy outrunning a ghost owl while also battling a dragon, dealing with a two faced snake and fighting off a lying jerk. And college. :D.

Chapter 13: Afterlife Shenanigans

Chapter by [Thanatophobia \(PuddieBlackCat\)](#)

I was running out of time... fast. It was an hour before the party, and Barnaby was in a rush. He would definitely put Sonic the Hedgehog to shame with the way he was rushing around tidying his manor, that's for sure. But somehow, everything was ready within the span of an hour. I was really depressed because I knew that this party was going to be my last. Barnaby himself must have noticed, since he called out with a laugh, "Don't be so down, Octavia~! Think of it as a rebirth of sorts!"

I paced the room that became my prison, my anxiety is through the roof. I hear a couple of Barnaboos humming a funeral dirge to me. I whip my head around and snarl, "Can you fuckers quit humming!? You're not helping my anxiety here! You're making shit worse!" They disbanded, laughing like a bunch of gremlins on speed. I groan in irritation. *I won the bad luck lottery.* I thought to myself miserably. Then I start theorizing about other me's just to ignore the impending sense of doom, like one who is sitting at some college, eating ramen and laughing their ass off at my misfortune. "Ha! No version of me could even be remotely like Barnaby!" I exclaim aloud, breaking out in crazed, terrified laughter.

I should really watch my mouth when I'm in Barnaby Manor. I lean back and press against something feathery. And long... like a feathered boa. "Wait. I don't have a feathered boa." I realized. Then I take a good look at what I'm leaning against. It was black, feathery and LONG. I followed the long black thing and found a giant taloned hand. I swatted it, and the hand grabbed me and twirled me around. Then I hear crazed giggling. "Oy!" I yell, pulling loose.

Then Barnaby's eyes appeared on his talon. He winked at me before talking with his hand. "Did you really just high five me?" He asked, his swirling orange eyes fixated on me.

I thought to myself, *Oh, I'm going to high five you, alright. Right in the mouth. With my face.* I replied, "No. Just an experimental bap." Then I pat his talon, smirking. "Bap." His eyes glared at me, then shifted away back to his face. I continued swatting his talon, unaware that Barnaby was right behind me. "Hey! Get back here, you feathered prick! Take what is given to you! Your humming stinks! Would you QUIT IT!?" I felt something behind me. I ignore it, continuing to bap the talon. "Hello there!" I bap him several times before the talon poked me hard in the nose. "Ow."

"What was that about my humming, Octavia?" Barnaby asked, his feathers pressing into my back. I swallow and look up. I laughed sheepishly as he ruffled my hair. Then he started poking me, causing me to laugh harder. "And don't insult me." He added, his tone of voice much more serious. He lifted me up and whispered, "I can give you a taste of this astral plane before you join it, just so that you are used to it." Before I could protest, he poked my forehead hard enough for me to find myself floating.

“Oh-hoo-hoo! Let me show you what you look like, dear Via.” Barnaby hooted as he pulled me to his room. He stroked my cheek as he had me look in a mirror. I gawk.

I look like a very femme Barnaby. My orange eyes had cat eyelashes, my beak was in a softer, kinder version of his own grin, and I trembled as I noticed that I was too similar to Barnaby for comfort. Except... one key difference. I was definitely more effeminate.

I yelp as he picked me up again, gently pulling me into his talons before flying high above the manor. He was laughing maniacally, “Ah-hoo-hoo-hoo-ha-ha-ha! Enjoy the view, my Via! Soon you will be flying with me and hunting with the best of my pretties!” I glance down, clinging to his feathers. He was flying faster. If it wasn’t happening to me, I would say that it is comical.

Finally he flew above the clouds and showed me a beautiful night sky. I can see the stars and the moon. His eyes glowed as he smirked. Then that feathery bastard out of hell started flying upside down. I cling to the back of his pink waistcoat, my eyes huge with terror. Then he dived towards his manor with a crazed giggle. He lands in the parlor, chucking me inside. *OOF!* I gasp, then I bounce back into my body. I felt that funny falling sensation you feel when you are about to fall asleep. Then I woke up, panting. “So, Via. How did it feel to be floating and flying free from that pesky mortal coil? Did you like it?” He asked, his tail feathers swishing in excitement. Then he bent down and pressed his cheek against mine. Barnaby whispered, his mouth shifting to the side of his face, “Did you crave more?”

I was trembling too hard to answer properly. My teeth chattered at what I saw. There was no denying it now: my soul was definitely not human. And Barnaby exposed that ugly truth to me through astral projection. “Holy [hoot]!” I yell, then I glance at my mouth.

“Ah, ah, ah~!” Barnaby sang, placing a talon to my mouth. I licked his talon as a means to sass him and I instantly regret it. He drew his talon back with a speed similar to Sonic’s. To be painfully honest, his talon tasted like poultry that went extremely bad. “I worked hard on this new spell, Octavia. We can’t have you swearing like a sailor when you are going to be my daughter along with my favorite little helper!” He ruffled my hair with a chuckle.

I get experimental. “B[hoot]h, c[hoo]t, sh[hoo-hoo]t, f[hoot], s[redacted].” I say quickly, looking in the mirror. Each time I try to swear, a censor bar with Barnaby’s face appeared over my mouth. I sigh, “Oh my [hoot]ing god.” I try flipping him off. My hand got completely censored. I grin, looking like a little devil. “Morse code!” I giggled.

Barnaby rolled his eyes, causing his entire face to shift around. “You silly little owlet. But don’t lick me! That’s gross!” He exclaimed, before his face shifted into a devious and creepy smirk. “You don’t know where it has been~!” He teased.

I grumble, “Dupek.” My face lit up as I realized that he only censored the English words. Barnaby rolled his eyes again, then made a silly expression. I get really smart. I told Barnaby, “Hey, Barnaby. I’m going to teach you the Polish phrase for ‘Welcome to the party!’” I grin as Barnaby’s eyes lit up. He looked super eager. I told him, “Jeść imprezę, suki.”

He hooted happily, preening his feathers. Then he left, practicing how to say “fuck the party, bitches” in Polish. Then he yelled, “Time to start the party!” I was already dressed identical

to him. I was determined to get the last laugh in. I watch as a few new souls enter Barnaby's manor. I think one of them is Polish, which totally fucked up my plan of making him look like an asshole.

I decided to eavesdrop. Polish Soul asked, "Who's the weird owl calling us bitches and to fuck the party?" I was biting back giggles until Timothy overheard that question. He stared at me with a raised eyebrow before flying off.

I hear Timothy plead softly, "Baron Barnaby! I think you should not say that phrase! It doesn't mean Welcome to the Party!" Barnaby stared, his black ear feathers pricked. Then they laid back for two seconds. He was staring at me with anger in his golden eyes. I smirk. *Even though I'm going to die tonight, that was so worth it!* I thought giddily as I darted off laughing like a maniac.

Chapter 14: There Should Be No Strings Attached...

Chapter by [Thanatophobia \(PuddieBlackCat\)](#)

Barnaby snuck up behind me and lightly whacked the back of my head. I rub my head, glancing at him. I groan, glancing up. Saying that Barnaby was not amused was an understatement. He glared at me for a moment before smirking. I realized that I forgot he was bilingual... or a polyglot. I cannot remember the term to save my ass. He nudged me towards the egg as the party just began to pick up. I felt a strange energy that is similar to getting high, but I'm sober. My entire body began buzzing as the music began playing.

Barnaby whispered in my ear, "Do you feel that buzzing sensation in your heart?" I nod, quivering as the energy started getting stronger. It started getting stronger, similar to drinking a Monster Energy drink. He whispered again, "The party is calling for you. It's THIS way!" He shouted the last part, causing me to flinch and cover my ears. I felt him gently nudge me towards the party, causing me to quiver. I can feel it humming, tugging me in.

My heart was beating fast as he gently pushed me towards the giant egg thing. I glance to my left. The hourglass is now down to almost four inches of sand. This meant one thing: I'm out of time. I tried to yell for help, but I was officially alone. There's nobody who would save my ass this time.

Or so I thought. Just as I was about to step in, I felt something grab me. It felt sort of slimy, almost as if... "Aristotle!" I exclaimed, far too overjoyed. But that axolotl was more focused on getting me out of Dodge than my joy. He flew out of there again, except this time we didn't discuss anything. I felt him quiver as he flew me out of there. We landed in front of a theater. "Aristotle, where are we?" I ask.

"We should be safe here-!?" Aristotle began, fidgeting with his fins.

"Trespassers!? In MY theater!? You didn't pay admission!" A new voice yelled. To me it sounded like a *very* burnt-out Angel Dust. I whip my head around to see who the owner of the new voice is. I didn't see anything. "Up here, you muppet." The voice sounded pretty cranky. I glance up and gawk, stunned.

I thought I would be dealing with a spider. Thankfully, it was not an eight-legged bastard. Instead, it looked like another person... a person made of wood. I scratch the back of my head. That was when I felt something akin to thread wrap around my wrists and ankles. I tried to fight as I was lifted in the air. I see a pair of yellow eyes glaring at me underneath a giant hat. The red feather was adorable to me... if I wasn't scared. "Put me down!" I whine, trying to twist loose.

The yellow eyes soften a little. "Oh, my apologies, darling. I'm Fantoccio the Great!" He took off his hat and bowed in the air. I was no longer scared, instead intrigued. I got a good look at this puppet. He's honestly adorable, to be honest. His three teeth are cute, and the puff of hair looked like vanilla ice cream... if vanilla ice cream was made of wood. His forest

green poncho was adorable too. “Are you hear to see me act, my sweet?” He asked as he got close to me.

I hesitate. I didn’t want to say no to be rude. Instead, I say, “Actually, were you looking for an actress? I have some acting experience under my belt.” I have been in a play and have been on stage multiple times. My singing voice is not exactly something to write home about, but it is soft enough. I silently curse myself for not writing a resume.

Fantoccio paused. “An actress?” He asked. I thought he sounded suspicious. I nod. “Is there another reason why you are asking me for a job? Or are you desperate, my dear?” He asked, leaning close.

I can’t lie anymore. I come clean, flinching. “Yes. You see, there’s this ghost owl-!” I begin, and Fantoccio shut me up with a finger to my lip.

“That is more than enough information for me, little girl!” He exclaimed. Fantoccio tutted, shaking his head. “So, you are here to seek asylum from my boyfriend?” He asked, his voice deadly soft.

“Yeah, you have... an interesting taste in boyfriends.” I shoot back. I don’t mention macabre, twisted and insane is his type. “Your boyfriend has been trying to kill me. He’s already kidnapped me twice!”

That caught Fantoccio’s attention. “Bar-” He began before I cut him off.

“Shh!? Don’t summon him!” I hiss, my eyes wide with terror.

Fantoccio sighed irritably, adjusting his hat as if to go give Barnaby an ass kicking. “Sorry, *my boyfriend* has just told me that he found his daughter’s soul... in a different vessel!” He exclaimed. “He has told me all about you! But you look nothing like his daughter! You look like me, sweetie!” He proclaimed before circling me. “What’s your name, little one?” He asked.

“A... Puddie.” I quickly decided that I was best off using my childhood nickname.

“Pudding?” Fantoccio asked, his voice deadly serious. I nod, gulping. I had the strange sense that I said the wrong thing. There was a very tense silence as he stared at me with his eyes wide. Then he burst out laughing. “That is so hilarious!” Fantoccio managed to choke out. Then he cleared his throat. “Now what’s your real name?” He asked, grinning. He took out a block of wood and begin whittling. The smell of wood brought back memories of my dad making stuff in my childhood home. My house (and clothes) always smelled like wood.

“A-Alison.” I stutter.

Fantoccio froze, as if I had told him that Shakespeare is Bacon. He stopped whittling in a very abrupt way. I was worried that I might have cut a finger. Then he turned slowly to me, his yellow eyes wide. “Alison?” His voice boomed through the theater. I nod, trembling. “As in Alison Black!?” He shouted. I flinch, nodding. Aristotle cut me loose. I begin trying to scurry out. But Fantoccio had other ideas, apparently. He sang as he chased me on stage.

I recognize the song. “I’ve Had Enough of You” was a song that constantly gets me fucked up back in my reality when I was playing a certain musical platformer that stars a cute little goat. I use some parkour to avoid injury. I try to reason with him during battle. At the end of his song, I look around and realize that there was a problem.

Fantoccio was so mad that his theater was falling apart. I yell, "Fantoccio! Cool your damn BEANS! Your theater is not structurally stable!" I was dodging debris, sure that one wrong hit would send me back to Barnaby's Manor faster than I could say that ghost owl's name.

He finished with a bow, then he shouted, “Barnaby is going to love to learn the reason why you chose my THEATER to hide in!” I froze. Then I saw red. *That fucking puppet ratted me out.* I realized. Then I felt the theater get cold. I scan my surroundings, instantly alert and ready to flee. I see a black and purple portal appear, and that was when my worst nightmare stepped through, ducking to enter. He has definitely gotten taller... Then it hit me that Barnaby had probably intentionally made himself taller to be intimidating. I’ve played enough video games to know that ghosts are generally not good news. I duck into the wings of the theater, running stage left. I hide backstage as that puppet greeted Barnaby like a longtime lover. Then I hear kissing noises. I wanted to hurl. Then Fantoccio rats me out. “Barnaby, honey, your kid’s vessel ran stage left.” He said with a purr.

I yell back as I scurried backstage, “OY, MORNING WOOD! WATCH IT!” I had a bad feeling that I shouldn’t have said that. So I hop in a tank that’s below the stage and hide underwater. I feel something brush my leg. I turn to see his pet shark cuddling up to me. I hold still, grateful I wasn’t wearing any jewelry.

After a minute, I hear Barnaby comment to Fantoccio, “Are you sure, my darling puppet?” He sounded flirty. I don’t hear what Fantoccio says, since I ended up swimming into his dressing room. I spit out water. I was only under there for a few minutes. I climb out and sneak out of the theater. I learned a few hard lessons within the span of eight minutes: don’t trust puppets, Barnaby is homoromantic, and I can hold my breath for two minutes. I have no clue what happened to Aristotle, though.

Chapter 15: I Transform... But Hoo am I?

Chapter by [Thanatophobia \(PuddieBlackCat\)](#)

I felt bitterness as I ran away from that theater. I cursed myself out for being so stupid... and so naive. I wipe angry tears from my eyes as I start parkouring. I couldn't see straight. I can't believe I was thrown under the bus by someone I thought I can trust yet again. The last time I felt betrayal that bitter was at my old college before Three Rivers. I force myself to swallow that bitter pill that even autistic people... or puppets can screw you over.

I finally run inside of Aristotle's tent, flopping on his beanbag chair and letting out all of the sobs that has built up for a long time. I curled up into the tightest, tiniest ball my little body could muster. I shook and trembled, early warning signs of a meltdown. I grab a weighted blanket and curl up tightly. I let the sobs out, my tears staining the soft purple fabric. I didn't hear Billie enter. But I did feel a little hoof on my side. I peek out to see Billie's blue eyes gaze at me. I sniffle, wiping my nose on my sleeve.

I tried to smile but I couldn't even muster a tiny grin. I curl up tightly and whispered, "Sorry for the worry. Wait... where is Aristotle!?" I remembered that I accidentally left him behind. I panicked, getting out of my little pity trip and ready to go save Aristotle from whatever trouble he may have bumped into.

"Aristotle's fine. It's you I'm worried about, Ali." Billie replied as she used a hoof to brush a hair out of my face. I tilt my head. "Your sobs caught my attention. What's wrong?" She asked.

"Fantoccio-!" I began but she cut me off with a sigh.

"Fantoccio threw you under the bus too?" She asked. I nod, curling back into the beanbag with a hiss at the mention of his name. I notice Billie flinch before scolding me, "Hey! Don't hiss at me! I had dealt with enough of that from Elaine! I don't need you being a spicy nugget!" That got me out of my bad mood. There was an awkward pause, before I begin giggling. I come out from under the weighted blanket. "Save it for when you are in danger!" Billie added, gently nudging my arm.

I finally force myself to ask the question that is nagging at me. "So... you had prior experience with dealing with those two "lovable" assholes?" I ask.

"Yeah. Barnaby is not someone you want to screw with. I tried to get the gem once. Ten outta ten, would not recommend." She replied, shrugging. "But we got it in the end. Err... Oscar and I."

"So why is he here!?" I ask. Then I look at the gem Aristotle has. I squint at it, used a magnifying glass and froze. There was the tiniest chip in the gem Billie fetched. My grandmother taught me enough about diamonds for me to spot a fabulous fake. "Billie... I think he faked a gem." I said slowly.

“You can’t fake a magic-!?” Billie started before I showed her the small chip. “Oh. That sneaky owl.” Billie whispered, horrified.

“Oh-hoo-hoo-hoo! But I did fake it, party crasher!” A new voice chimed in. I felt the hairs on my arms stand on end. I turn slowly to see the cartoonish owl that seemed to come straight from animator hell staring at us. He preened his wing... as if he was proud of himself for his hoax. “Via. Octavia Yenschuf, you are ordered to my party post haste.” He added, making sure to glare at us. He pointed directly at me as he gave the order.

That was when I got the smart idea to sing “2 Minutes Notice” from Helluva Boss.

[After singing to Barnaby and giving my two minutes notice about the whole thing was when I realized that I may have fucked up. If Barnaby was not a cranky ghost owl before, he sure as hell was cranky now!](#)

To say that Barnaby was not amused by my little performance would be the understatement of the millenia. He started shifting his body, becoming longer... leaner... more draconian. I ran like hell as he started letting plumes of smoke leave his mouth. I ran before he could even half consider an Ali Barbecue. I felt something hit the back of my knee. I land on something leathery before something else smashed me against a tree. I felt the wind knocked out of me before I see his orange eyes gaze at me with pure rage. “Octavia. You’re lucky I am saving the best kind of death for when your feathers develop!” He growled, smoke billowing out of his mouth.

I begin coughing violently, scratching at him and hissing between coughs. I perform an act of defiance. I spat out between coughs, deciding to quote JT Music, “If death is a choice, then I REJECT IT!” Then I flip him off. Maybe giving the giant ghost bird the bird wasn’t the smartest idea but it was worth it. His gem glowed brighter, catching my attention in a worrying way.

“Octavia.” Barnaby warned, and said nothing else. That should have been a clue to shut the fuck up, but in case you guess, I’m not good at picking up on subtle hints. I kept going, getting very overstimulated.

“FUCK OFF! JUST FUCK OFF ALREADY!” I shrieked, pulling my hair. There was a tense silence that left everyone in that tent quiet. I can see Barnaby’s expression change, switching from shock to anger within the span of thirty seconds.

“Octavia Yenschuf, I have been patient with your atrocious behavior but this is UNACCEPTABLE!” Barnaby screeched. He pointed his gem at me with a very malicious glare. “Your feathers have been missing for 23 years! *IT’S HIGH TIME I FIXED THAT!*” A beam of golden light hit my chest, blowing me off my feet and knocking me into a tree.

I wince, slowly getting to my feet. Then I froze. My feet felt wrong... as if something was making my bones rubber. I look at my sneakers and my face paled. I run out of the tent, tripping over my feet. I try to grab at something only to discover that my bones felt lighter... My shoes threatened to burst as I ran. Everything itched badly as I ran. I trip, tumbling down the hill into Pygmyshire. My mouth felt hard and I trip over myself. I check my feet just as

my shoes burst... revealing bird feet. My arms felt as if they were injected with novocaine. I look at them in horror as my hands warped in a way to resemble nubs.

The worst was when I felt the itching sensation. Long, voluminous brown feathers of different shades popped up all over my body, and my head felt unscrewed. I turn my head just as my clothes burst, revealing that I was turning into a bird. I flap my new wings as I ran, panicking and agitated. I end up crashing into Aristotle. I kinda felt bad for him as he got a faceful of... whatever I turned into.

I lay trembling at his feet, scared. Aristotle gawked at me as if I was an alien from another planet. "Aristotle!" I pleaded, my voice sounding a bit weird to me.

"Ali!? Is that you!?" Aristotle asked, stumbling away from me. His axolotl face was pale, as if he saw something disturbing. He backed away quickly, his eyes on me.

"Yes! What is it!?" I asked.

"Ali. Do you have any idea on who you look like right now!?" Aristotle asked as he helped me to my feet. My wing wrapped around him in support.

"No."

"You look just like Barnaby when he was alive! Right down to the glasses and ear feathers!" He ushered me to a mirror just so that I could see exactly what happened to me. I gawk. I have seen a few pictures of Barnaby when he was alive... and I look like a girl version of alive him!

Chapter 16: Impromptu Flying Lessons

Chapter by [Thanatophobia \(PuddieBlackCat\)](#)

I scream in absolute terror over the fact that I have transformed into an owl, flapping my new wings in an agitated manner. I was scared... and pissed that my appearance was changed without a discussion of any sort. I had enough trouble seeing myself as pretty because I was often told by my brother that I was not exactly pretty. Everyone else says that I'm pretty but my brother finds every excuse to pick on me. When I wore my goth-scene stuff, he called me a clown, but I digress. I curl tight, looking like a trembling feathery ball.

Everyone tried their best to comfort me as I had my freakout. I pace, my tail feathers swishing weirdly behind me. I was even more uncomfortable with the fact that I essentially look like a very femme alive Barnaby. And the waistcoat is not helping matters. My body felt very alien and foreign to me. I felt too itchy, too light, and as I turned my head, even my neck didn't feel right to me. It felt like an alien experience even by my standards. I was so upset that as I started flapping my wings in agitation, I didn't realize I was flying. I had a complete meltdown as I flew higher. "HELP! I'M FLYING OFF! I DON'T KNOW WHAT THE FUCK I AM DOING! HOO HOO!" I scream. Nobody could help me... except Billie. They hopped on their broom brolley (That is what Aristotle called it. Sue me) and flew after me. I was silently cursing Barnaby's full name between my beak. If I had a Barnaby plushie, I would be sticking pins in it.

I was flapping my wings too hard and having a panic attack at first. I didn't notice Billie flying to me to calm me down until she was right next to me. "Ali! Focus on me!" Billie yelled, their blue eyes gleaming. I gawked as I flew, almost falling. I caught myself before I could crash into a tree facefirst and kiss it. "Okay, deep breaths." Billie instructed. I breathe in and out shakily. They flew next to me, slowly.

[I was too angry at Barnaby to realize that I was flying. I saw crimson as my wings beat frantically. If I had a nickel for every time I was screwed over by that owl, I would own a yacht.](#)

"This weird and terrifying experience is beyond my pay grade." I grumble. I found that I was getting tired, so I stopped flapping my wings, opting to glide. I look at my wings, my terror becoming something else. I am much calmer now. I was in the sky for fifteen minutes.

"Ali! You're doing it! You're flying!" Billie cheered. "And don't worry, I'll catch you if you fall!" She added, trying to reassure me. It's kind of hard to pay attention to what that goat was saying and to fly at the same time, but I somehow managed to pull that rabbit out of my butt.

It took me two minutes for the flying lessons to click. I smiled for the first time in what seemed like ages, then I cracked up. I didn't realize that my laugh was turning into hooting. "Ha-ha-ha-hoo hoo hoo!" I snicker. Then I glance up at Billie to show my excitement. "Holy fuck! I'm flying!" I yell. My grin quickly disappeared as I glanced up to something past

Billie and noticed a dark shadow cast over both of us. I squint up at a bird shaped... shadow in the sky. I noticed that the sun glinted off of something that appeared to be a gem.

As the thing dived towards both myself and that light purple goat, my ecstasy quickly turned to terror. "BILLIE! INTO THE SHADOWS! **NOW**!" I shriek, trying to figure out how to land. "Shit, I don't know how to land!" I hissed at myself as the black thing became distinguishable. It was Barnaby... and she somehow looked even more deranged than usual. Their tongue was sticking out, looking like a bright orange snake and his mouth was wide open in a crazy grin. Her swirling orange eyes glowed and sparkled as he got too close for comfort. I was flapping frantically, getting into Pygmyshire. I yelled trying to alert someone of my deadly predicament, "Bird-bean going down! May-day! May-day!"

"Fold your wings!" Billie yelled as she pantomimed tucking in wings. I obeyed her panicked yell, crash landing face first into Pygmyshire. I skid in the dirt... right in front of Aristotle. I was covered in dirt, and I left a sixteen foot long trail. I hear Billie flying off, probably to distract the ghost owl who would gladly make you kick the bucket for a chance to join their party. I groaned in pain, and Aristotle pulled me to my feet, dusting myself off.

"Sorry, Aristotle. I panicked," I admitted, ashamed. "I'm okay, though!" I reassure him, trying my best to keep myself level headed. It's not Aristotle's fault that I was born a species that does not exist in his universe. He had tried to undo what Barnaby did but to no avail.

"Ali, it's perfectly natural for you to panic when you have autism and a drastic change happens to you. But I watched you in the sky," Aristotle commented. "You looked like you were having a lot of fun until you know hoot showed up."

"I know. And yes, I didn't have any landing lessons. I don't know how I got down here without breaking my neck." I grumble, shaking myself. I shudder afterwards. It felt too weird and too natural at the same damn time. I flap my wings a lot slower to try to keep myself grounded. I love heights, but that doesn't necessarily mean that heights love me.

"We'll practice that later." Aristotle promised, brushing dirt out of my ear feathers. I glance up and my eyes widen in terror. I didn't realize that scared yellow eyes is even scarier. Billie was trying to distract Barnaby... and she wasn't doing a great job. His swirling orange eyes are laser focused on me, and I shove Aristotle out of the way.

We end up tumbling downhill. I grunt and hit every bump on the way down. The ground and sky seemed to blend together. Then I faceplant right in front of Lain. "Ow..." I grumble. Then I see their concerned face. I get super embarrassed and dust myself, standing shakily on my bird feet. "Uh... you weren't supposed to see that." I grumble.

Lain rubbed my feathers and shooed me to safety. Barnaby's a lot faster than what he had originally let on. I didn't think an owl who is dead can move fast, but goddamn, does he give Sonic the Hedgehog a run for his money! I watched as he kicked up dirt as he landed, dusting off his hot pink waistcoat as if this was a normal occurrence. Then he stretched his neck down to my level and tsked at the amount of dirt that covered me.

"Octavia. However, in my darling pocket dimension...? HOW did you manage to get so filthy? You're an owl now, not some lowly goat like that rude character Billie. It's high time

you behaved like an owl!” He scolded, dusting me with an arrogance only Barnaby could pull off. I try to break loose, but he pinched my cheeks between his talons and start straightening my feathers. I begin protesting, my squished face probably looking adorable. “Don’t be ridiculous, dear!” He exclaimed in a goofy tone.

Then I make the one mistake I wish I hadn’t made. “You’re not my father, Barnaby.” I grumbled.

I watch as his face shifted from a wide variety of moods. Literally, His face went briefly Picasso out of shock, then it shifted back to normal in fury. Then he did the unspeakable and shapeshifted into... my birth father. That was a real punch to the gut. “Is this better, Via?” Barnaby asked coldly, a harsh parody of my dad’s voice escaping his mouth. He pulled me away, shifting back into himself. Then he dragged me away by the scruff of my neck, his face in silent fury. I realized that I fucked up yet again... and there is no going back this time.

Chapter 17: An LGBTQ+ Refresher and Revelations

Chapter by [Thanatophobia \(PuddieBlackCat\)](#)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

I was pulled mercilessly back through a black and purple portal. I finally got the chance to ask, “Barnaby! What the hell is eating at you!?” I noticed that Barnaby was looking mad. He sat me down roughly at one of his chairs. My legs swung as I sat down so abruptly. My feet couldn’t even touch the floor, his chair was that big.

“Via! You say I’m not your father! But let me tell you something! I know exactly what your sexuality is! I fucking support you no matter what, like a real father would! I’m ace and homoromantic!” He scolded angrily. “Your vessel’s father showed discomfort behind your back! And your brother was... ugh. He was rude to me about being homoromantic until he figured out the pecking order!”

“Wait, where the f[hoot]k did the discussion of sexuality come in?” I ask, jarred by this sudden change of topic. I was barely able to follow along with Barnaby’s train of thought. Barnaby sometimes made zero sense to me, which is fine since sometimes I make zero sense to myself.

“When... when whatshisface? Ludo? When he wrote that love is important. I know my friend Billie well. She is fine with other people being in love, but she is indifferent about love in general. She is aroace but I don’t know how to tell them this since I’m not her parent.” Barnaby responded coldly.

I knew of Ludo. They supported me. And I didn’t realize he was aphobic.

That was when Billie stormed into Barnaby Manor, mad as hell. “Barnaby! Are you seeing this!?” She seethed, plopping a laptop down on the table. Barnaby and I both looked at each other in confusion. This has to be the first time we have seen Billie mad. I quickly read what she was showing. It was a romance ship fanfic. I look at Billie and raised an eyebrow at the goat. “I don’t find anyone attractive!”

Barnaby and I both traded a glance at each other. I think Barnaby forgot about the pissy comment I made about him not being my father. I think he backburnered it because his priorities are to make sure Billie feels better. Barnaby’s expression showed confusion. Mine was much more understanding. “Billie, that sounds aroace and I support you. In fact, you find nobody attractive? Romance bores you?” I ask.

Billie nodded, looking ashamed. “This guy just made me uncomfortable because I don’t even know who or what a Seve is.” She admitted. “I find nobody attractive. Romance is boring. I don’t know of anyone out in the world who is anything like me.” I glance at Barnaby and it clicked for me: Billie is aroace and feels like they are the only one who is aroace in the world.

“Billie. I think I need to introduce you to a little YouTube channel called Jaiden Animations.” I pipe up. I pull up an animation that basically described her aroace experiences, and what did you know? Billie’s aversion to romance fits this animation to a T.

I stare her dead in the eye. “Billie. I figured it out. You’re aroace. You’re valid. And whoever said that you haven’t found the right person clearly does not see that romance and sex ain’t important and that it is okay to be aroace.” I reassure her. I personally believe that if Billie is not interested in love, they should not be shipped with other people.

I turn to Barnaby. I ask sarcastically, “Alright. Back to the subject at hand. ‘Zom,’ what is my sexuality and gender?”

Barnaby began hooting and flapping his wings in excitement. “Oh-hoo-hoo-hoo-hoo! Little Via finally acknowledged me as a zad!” He exclaimed. Then he cleared his throat and adjusted his pink bowtie. “To answer your question, I watched your reaction to the deed. You seem disinterested and you don’t seem to feel much at all. And yet, you flirt with all of my Barnaboos and make dirty jokes sometimes. So, you are panromantic and asexual!” He stretched his neck over to me and got his face a little bit too close to my face. He was making that creepy “hm” face as he eyed me. “Tell me, Via. What pronouns do you prefer?” He asked, hooting while flapping his wings.

I had the perfect answer ready. “Any pronoun, really. The reason why is to annoy the crap out of society.”

Barnaby nods. “What about that friend of yours? Lain, is it?” He pressed.

“Lain’s pronouns are they/them and they’re lesbian.” I replied.

“What about Aliyah?” He got really close to my face.

“She/her and bisexual.” I replied. Then I pause as something occurred to me. “Wait, you’re not judging them, are you?” I ask cautiously.

“Afterlife to Betsy, no! I’m the least judgmental ghost owl you’re ever going to meet. I’m dead anyways, so judging people is a waste of time, hoo-hoo-ha-ha-ha!” He replied. I take note of this since he was very flippant and flamboyant.

I squint, and finally decided to ask him the question that has been bugging me. “Barnaby, what kind of owl are you? I know you’re not a snowy owl or a barn owl. Neither of them have those... uh... plumicorns you got!” I ask, pointing at his long ear feathers.

“Oh? I’m a long-eared ghost owl, Via!” He retorted, preening a wing briefly. I admit Barnaby does look pretty smug.

That felt like a duh moment for me. I thought he was a Great Horned owl. That frickin Yandere Barnaby on Character.ai kinda mentally fucked with me there. And admittedly, Character.ai kinda paints Barnaby as pansexual, even though he is asexual and homoromantic. So I take everything said by Character.ai Barnaby with as many grains of salt that can be mustered. I also know that he is probably aware of...

“Via. I’m aware that someone had voice claimed Gabe Brown for me so that I can talk to audiences in your universe. I’m popular there, you know, darling.” Barnaby cut through my thoughts.

“Wait, who is Gabe Brown?” I was definitely confused... until Barnaby started singing a very familiar song. He was singing “Insane” by Black Gryph0n. It hit me like a truck. Admittedly, I’m not the sharpest tool in the shed when it comes to anything in regards to My Little Pony. And I do love Black Gryph0n’s music.

[As he started to sing the first couple of lines, I recognized it immediately. I start singing along with Barnaby, surprised that he was a Black Gryph0n fan too even though I took him to be more of a Oingo Boingo or Weird Al Yankovich kind of owl.](#)

“Now, let’s see if we can get you reunited with me, Via!” Barnaby hooted, flapping his wings in excitement. I knew what this meant: He was going to try to get me out of my mortal coil again. This time he would stop at nothing and not hold back.

Chapter End Notes

Yeah, I wrote this chapter when I was pissed. And it serves as a reminder to myself to just add a small spin. Like Barnaby preening his wing feathers as a stim is my own tiny spin since it remains true to his character. I have a rule called when in doubt don't ship. Ludo, if you are reading this, Vivziepop is not a good person to take advice from when it comes to shipping. The devs are much more reliable than someone who did some scummy shit for a long time.

Chapter 18: Barnaby's Gone Berserk

Chapter by [Thanatophobia \(PuddieBlackCat\)](#)

I gasped in horror as he started to shoo me towards his dressing room, opening a secret compartment to show a fitting room complete with a sewing machine, fabrics and even a measuring tape. I flapped my wings indignantly as he tsked at the mini skirt and the crop top I had somehow managed to put on. I protested that what I am currently wearing is completely fine. Barnaby's response was to snap his talons and change into a hot pink miniskirt with a matching crop top. His gem now sat on a necklace as he leaned in really close. "Is this fine, Octavia?" Barnaby asked, grinning and shifting his face.

I knew he was trying to screw with me so that I would wear something formal. I gaze back, put my wings on my hips like a sassy little bird and replied, "Yes! In fact, I think you wear it better than me! Pink is definitely your color!" I fluffed myself up to look bigger. I think I looked goofy to Barnaby, because then he puffed his black feathers up and made himself twice his size easily, scaring me into hiding in my wings.

Then he straightened my feathers out a few times before preening himself. He flapped his wings and got comfy. I'm personally scared of Barnaby's temperament. Then I hear Fantoccio somewhere in the manor. I bristle, ready to hiss. I felt myself being lifted to Barnaby's eye level. He scolded, "That's enough, hoo hoo hoo hoo hoo. That's just my loving boyfriend."

I gasp as he started fitting me into a pale pink waistcoat. I gasp as he measured my waist, legs, everything. Then he placed a pair of bright purple glasses on his beak and wrote down measurements. I turn to say something when I saw something odd. He was sewing up a waistcoat identical to his. He began polishing a black stone with a swirling blue hue. Then he stared at me with his swirling orange eyes gleaming crazily. He had a creepy grin on his face... identical to the one he makes when he says "hm."

I start flying out of there fast, only to be grabbed around the waist and held in the air. "Hoo-hoo-hoo! Watch it! I'm ticklish!" I yelp. He ruffled my ear feathers with a foot that was poking out of a black and purple portal. I duck, grumbling. Then he shooed me into the party, causing me to tremble. His orange little minions flock around me and start chattering excitedly. Then the party kicked off with a bang... literally. I hear fireworks outside and I peek. I read the display aloud. "Welcome home, Octavia Yenschuf!?" I splutter. I face... wing? I shrink back and begin wandering around the home. There were a lot of discussions. So I eavesdrop on a group of Barnaboos just for shits and giggles. The conversation I heard chilled me to the bone.

Barnaboo 1: "I feel bad for Barnaby, to be honest. He has been looking for his daughter's ghost for a century now. But he did say that he found her soul in a different universe altogether. Remember those weird fleshy things that almost look like axolotls but lack gills?"

Barnaboo 2: "What are they called... humans?"

Barnaboo 1: “Yeah, those things. Apparently there is a very special one. An autistic one. Found the little sprout and tried getting her to party.” I hear that Barnaboo giggle. “That human was feisty. Screamed her little head off the first time she saw Barnaby. I think our host cried themselves to sleep that night when his daughter didn’t recognize him.”

Barnaboo 2: “You can’t blame the little featherless owl. Seeing an owl that is eight times your size telling you to die might be unnerving.”

It didn’t take God to figure out that they were talking about me. Then my blood chilled as I hear the conversation continue. I catch wind of a “Gem of Transformation” before I realized that they might be-

WHACK.

“Ow!” I exclaim, rubbing the back of my head. I turn around and bit back a scream. Barnaby was right behind me this whole time and I didn’t fucking notice. I laid my ears flat, shame and embarrassment on my face.

“No eavesdropping, Octavia. That’s rude.” Barnaby scolded, his orange eyes glowing with a dangerous light... literally. Then he pushed me to a different part of the dreaded party, nudging at me to eat something. I pour myself a Truly’s before pausing. I noticed that the ice cubes were not floating but sinking to the bottom instead. I knew what this meant because I watched Helluva Boss: that means that it was spiked. Or worse. That was when Barnaby stepped out of a black portal in front of me. I internally panic, then I force myself to think back to the time before Lain and my other friends.

I was on set for a movie once and I was told to fake drinking something. I faked a sip, trying to act nonchalant in front of Barnaby. I feverishly prayed that my acting skills are enough to fool Barnaby. “Oh, hi, Barnaby. Before you get your feathers in a twist, yes, I’m 23 and yes it’s legal.” I reassured him. My first choice of words was a bit more inappropriate and would have earned me a mouth washing with poison.

I nonchalantly kept fake drinking and pretending that I was fine even though my face was tight with anxiety. I was scared that he would see through my act. I was right because fifteen minutes later, Timothy flew over to me and whispered, “Barnaby wishes to talk to you. She knows you don’t exactly like sudden changes in your routine.”

I shrug. This was honestly the most courtesy I had ever gotten from Barnaby. I approached the feathered bastard, unaware that he was devious. “You called, Barnaby?” I address her coldly. Her tail feathers swish gracefully as they turn to face me. My feathers puff up as he leads me to the bedroom he assigned me, moving with a grace that scares even the bravest of warriors. I enter the room, my own tail feathers ruffled. “Was it something I said?” I ask, now scared.

That was when he started hooting... and laughing sinisterly. I shiver as he closed the door to my assigned room. Then he turned with a very devilish grin. He opened his mouth... and I saw the most terrifying thing in the world: Barnaby has teeth that would make Shakespeares cower in terror. They were sharp and deadly looking. That was when that owl bastard shoved her face really close to mine. “Hoo hoo hoo hoo hoo ha ha ha ha ha! Via, nothing is wrong,

my little owlet. I'm excited to be reunited.” He fluffed his feathers and cackled insanely. “Not once in my afterlife did I think you would never come home. *Welcome home... darling!*” He whispered, puffing her chest up. “We will have you shedding that mortal coil... tonight! And this time your little friends can't stop me from bringing you home!”

I panic. Barnaby seems to be enjoying themselves as she cackles. “That egg... in the party... that will be your rebirth! I made a special gem so that you don't transform into a Barnaboo! You will take on after me! Hoo hoo hoo hoo hoo hoo!” He gloated, using his wings to caress my own wings. I glance frantically.

I had made a panic button in my free time specifically to alert my friends whenever Barnaby... well, pull a Barnaby. I threw my double Albert chain at it. I was desperate. The double Albert chain bounced off of the panic button and I exhaled. It clicked. Barnaby cackles and hoots wildly, flapping his wings. What he didn't know that the panic button sent a text. *Barnaby's gone berserk. Send help.*

Barnaby scooped me up in her wings, the black feathers glowing purple as he twirled me about. I get dizzy. Then he squeezed and puffed his feathers. “Nice try, little Octavia!” He hooted maniacally. I knew this was the end of the line... and nobody would be able to save me because they're in a different universe. He started singing “A Million Gruesome Ways to Die” again... and I was silently cursing Black Gryph0n between my beak for giving this adorable nightmare known as Barnaby a voice.

Chapter 19: I Become a LGBTQIA+ Therapist

Chapter by [Thanatophobia \(PuddieBlackCat\)](#)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

I yelp as that ghost owl blepped at me, his bright orange tongue showing. I squirm as she began to lead me towards my end of the line. I can see their teeth gleaming a sickly yellow as he got close to the damn egg. I kick and buck, trying to get free. I managed to get one wing free and accidentally hit him in the face. Timothy gawked, stunned at the fact that I would do that. I twist my head at Timothy and yell, “HEY! You with the face! I don’t feel like kicking the bucket!”

Timothy blinked, then replied with a sneer, “Too bad. Our gracious host is going to make sure you fit in.”

That was when I did the most asexual thing in the world. I look Timothy dead in the eye and replied, “Don’t make me say something dirty. I will do it for shock value.”

Barnaby hooted maniacally, then twisted his neck around my shoulders. He looked at me dead in the eye and cackled, “Hoo hoo hoo hoo hoo! Do it, Via. Nothing you say can phase me!”

Without missing a beat, I proceeded to shock everyone within earshot. I replied, “Barnaby, I know that you hate my sex jokes about owls having sex with ghosts, so boo fucking hoo.” The whole party went silent. Barnaby dropped me out of shock, his face shifting from joyous to shocked. I knew I had a few precious seconds to escape, so I ran like hell.

After Barnaby got his mental shit collected, he cackled before angrily yelling, “OCTAVIA YENSCHUF! YOU CANNOT SAY THAT!” I launched myself out of there and flew off. Ever since turning into an animal, I have adjusted to being an owl... sort of.

I settled in Pygmyshire out of spite, unaware that Barnaby would follow me. I got out of the afterlife through the grave portal. I was covered in dirt as I get to my tiny apartment in Pygmyshire. I had the last laugh this time.

I enter my apartment and flop on the beat up couch Socrates got rid of, my wings splayed. I blep, exhausted. I decided it was best to settle in since I can never go home. I learned that Barnaby had given me some sort of replenished magic through this nasty transformation. I have unconsciously followed in their footsteps... leaving my friends worried. Lain texted me, their message worried, “Al? You okay?”

I text back, finding using my feet to type a little uncomfortable, “Yes. I’m nosy.” Then I look around my little apartment. It was set up like a lab... and I was trying to figure out how magic works in this universe. I had to be really careful since if Barnaby messes with an

experiment of mine, I would end up at her party a lot sooner than when I care to arrive. I had to be really careful since if Barnaby gets a wild feather up his ass I'd be in real trouble.

I started reading the chemical formulas, unaware that Barnaby entered. I was trying to figure out how to reverse the damage Barnaby caused. I was only made aware when my science project turned from red to blue. I turn around just as the experiment bubbled. "Shit." I managed to utter before hitting the deck. The experiment exploded and barely hit me.

Then I heard Barnaby cackling like the mad owl she is. Then her head stretched into view. I realized that he was holding his head in his talons as they gazed at me. "Via. You put this off for too long!" He hooted and preened her feathers. Then he grabbed me and made reality warp. I felt ready to perform a Technicolor Yawn when that happened.

Barnaby Manor loomed over me as I gaze at the Tiffany glass. "Oh, Via... this is your home. But before we reunited, I need your honest opinion on a certain 'fan' who keeps shipping Billie with some other goat." I groan since it was a touchy subject. It's been months since he fell out of the Billie Bust Up fandom and his fall on Tumblr. "He is at it again. So, can you reassure Billie or give advice before joining my party?" Barnaby implored, fluffing their feathers.

I nod, then log into my laptop. I find a question on my Tumblr from Billie's account despite the fact that it was anonymously sent. It read,

Dear Sonicphobia,

I have zero interest in sex or romance. I'm indifferent to that and I don't feel comfortable with being romantically shipped. I'm supportive of shipping but don't feel comfortable with being shipped myself. Recently someone decided to ship me romantically with another goat that I know nothing about and I feel uncomfortable.

What do I do?

Signed, Aroace Goat

I had an answer ready. I typed back,

Dear Aroace,

Shipped with someone you don't like romantically, eh? It seems whoever is shipping you is tone deaf or can't read a room. I have a few suggestions, such as reminding them that queer platonic relationships do exist. Queer platonic relationships are different to romantic relationships by the means that romance or sex is not involved but they do love each other. Heck, queer platonic marriages are indeed a thing. It's not always love and sex.

If the problem persists, give them a firm reminder about digital footprints being a very real thing and can affect them negatively.

If they try to argue using Vivziepop to back up their argument, you can laugh at them since Vivziepop doesn't treat her employees well and bullies aroace people by being intentionally

tone deaf to the fact that some people are just disinterested in sex or romance. That is aphobia and I'm talking about the same person who uses the r slur.

So any argument that involves Vivziepop is hogwash and can be argued. Shipping is fun BUT we all have to be mindful of boundaries. Boundaries violated automatically makes the person shipping you romantically in the wrong... and God forbid if Vivziepop is brought up in an argument about being aroace. And if those boundaries are disregarded and your identity is erased for the sole purpose of a story plot, you can block tags.

Sincerely, Sonicphobia

I felt much better after giving that advice. Then I see another anonymous ask. I briefly read it to realize it was Barnaby this time. His diction is... unique. I will write it as I read it because if you have seen Barnaby's Twitter account, you know that it's sometimes a bit of an eyestrain.

Dear Sonicphobia,

I have a mild problem. Some of my fans write me in situations I have little to no interest in, such as sex or being in love with the opposite gender, despite the fact I'm asexual and homoromantic. What do I do?

Signed, Grossed out Party Host

I had to sit for a minute to process this. Barnaby is asking me for advice? I tilt my head before writing this:

Dear Host,

If it's explicit and goes into detail, if on Wattpad, you can report the story for sexually explicit content. On AO3, you can report it only if it's gratuitous and provides no plot. And you can filter it yourself on Tumblr and report porn bots. But the big thing to ask yourself is, "Are they really my fans if they don't respect my sexuality?" This goes for anyone shipping you with females.

Sincerely Sonicphobia

I close my laptop and gently tug on Barnaby's waistcoat with my beak. She bent down to put her swirling orange eyes close to my face. I murmur, "Sorry you're going through that." Barnaby puffed their feathers in joy at this.

Chapter End Notes

I swear, if I hear of anyone using AI to try to finish that story, I'm going to cause a plot twist!

Chapter 20: Fuck Around and Find Out

Chapter by [Thanatophobia \(PuddieBlackCat\)](#)

I start getting ushered into the party after giving advice. I think I earned respect here and some sort of prestige. I half expected bigotry and booing as I was shooed into the egg. I was surprised when all of the Barnaboos surround me and start congratulating me and acting like I have been one of them for ages. That was when I felt something weird beneath my skin. It was a pleasant warm sensation like getting into a hot bath on a cold day. I shake my head and touch my heart with a wing. “Um, Barnaby? Why is the room hot? Did someone turn on a thermostat?” I turn and ask Barnaby, noticing that her wings acted like barriers. I was trying to keep calm about the whole ordeal, but it wasn’t easy. I had finally agreed, but I made Barnaby promise that he would do it on my own terms and nobody else’s.

“No, no, little Via. That warm feeling you feel in you chest? That is what acceptance is.” Barnaby poked my chest with his wing. He hugged me tight and buried my face in his chest. “Oh, Via. I missed you terribly. No partying could get me to stop looking for my little owlet.” Then he guided me into the egg. I don’t bother fighting. I start thinking back to when I got those rude comments... they were terrible and were insulting my writing and called me woke despite the fact that I’m pansexual and ace. They all came from-

“Via.” Barnaby warned, her voice dipping an octave in a fruity but threatening way. Her feathers are ruffled and she did the time out symbol. I turn around and gawk. Barnaby has never done that before in her entire afterlife. “Did you just witness some... something bad?” Barnaby asked, her fruity voice low. I nod, trying to brush back tears. He ushered me out of the egg, noticing that Barnaby had an unusual air of worry about her. I was getting some really hateful comments online from a certain ‘fan’ of Billie Bust Up... queerphobic comments. It felt like that fan was ignoring what the devs are-

“Octavia. Focus on me. Focus on the party.” Barnaby ordered, their voice crisp and loud. I flinch, nodding. I hid in their wings, realizing that this party was specifically designed as a safe space for ghosts... and their guest who should have definitely died twice already. I was pulled away from the egg for a private discussion.

I should have died the first time Barnaby invited me in their home. I should have died the second time where they showed me the egg and the Gem of Transformation. And I definitely should have- Barnaby headbutted me playfully. They used their wing to sweep me somewhere private.

“Octavia. I have eyes on him.” Barnaby intoned, fluffing his feathers before preening them gently. Then he flapped his wings and hooted before lifting me up and swinging me around. I yelp, surprised by the sudden playful nature.

“Eyes on him?” I ask.

“Octavia, my plushies allow me to see different homes in your reality. I saw you with Mac a few times... the friend you refer to as Mac and Cheese,” Barnaby replied.

That felt like a duh moment to me. I remember wanting one but my ex kind of screwed me out of that opportunity. Heard that they are selling on eBay for around a hundred bucks though or even more if I push my luck. Then I turn to see my friends rushing towards me. "Lain! Aliyah! Thomas!" I exclaimed, hugging them all. I missed them terribly. I guess Barnaby was feeling particularly forgiving or saw that I craved the touch of the living. Don't get me wrong, since Barnaby's feathers are soft but also sticky. I much rather hug something living. I'm a little bit of a germaphobe that way.

Lain asked, their brown eyes wide, "Barnaby still hasn't-?" I shake my head. Then Lain dropped the biggest news on me. "I got a girlfriend." Lain stated. My smile never stretched so wide in my life. I hug tight, happy for them.

"What's her name?" I ask, ecstatic for Lain.

"Daisy." They replied, twirling a lock of brown hair between their fingers. Then Lain explains that Daisy is trans and I nod. "Yeah, she's so cool!" Lain kept talking, and I listen attentively. Ever since becoming a long eared owl, my attention span heightened a lot... maybe too much.

I hug Aliyah next after I was done hugging Lain. Aliyah commented, her dark skin flushed, "Ali, you are much fluffier than when I last saw you." She commented, her mushroom skirt ruffled.

Thomas and I fist bump... wing? Ehh, at this point, I was so used to being an owl that it wasn't funny.

Barnaby cleared her throat and ushered me elsewhere. She was holding a hot pink dress and a dark orange one. "Via. I feel a little femme fatale. Which color works best? I like the pink but the orange looks... prettier somehow." Barnaby asked me. That was when I decided to pull something risky.

"Try putting both on. Then look in a mirror and see which one you like the best." I replied, trying to keep calm. Death is still scary, but not in a "one stab and you will be gone from existence" scary. Death is scary like the stern parent figure who you really don't want to disappoint. There is no better way to explain it to you.

As Barnaby modeled, I note that pink and orange are definitely his colors for different reasons. The orange matches his eyes, but pink makes him really pop out of a crowd of Barnaboos. I couldn't decide, but Barnaby decided easily. "Pink it is! Hoo hoo hoo hoo hoo!" He cackled as he wore the dress.

Then they gazed outside for a minute. I noticed Barnaby getting a little teary eyed as he stared at the stars and the moon. I place a talon on his wing and gaze at him. "What's your best friend saying?" I ask, trying to reassure Barnaby the best I could.

"The moon... is saying... that you are the best offspring an owl like me can ask for. I am sorry for missing your soul's rebirth! I'm sorry for scaring you s a child, Via!" Barnaby replied, its voice soft. It sounded ready to cry...

I can only awkwardly pat him. Then I hear the clocks strike midnight. I whip my head to see the egg opening. “Via! The Gem of Transformation! It calls you!” Barnaby quickly changed their mood and ushered me forcefully towards the egg. I knew for a fact that I couldn’t delay it anymore. I was instantly rushed out of Barnaby’s room, with Barnaby growing with an excitement and frantic way that is almost terrifying. As we ran, I notice that they’re now 140 feet tall. I ended up perched on their head somehow and got a kick ass view of the party.

I keep forgetting that Barnaby can make himself a giant if his mood really hits him. I grip a plumicorn, forgetting I’m an owl. Barnaby was hooting and chuckling to himself as he noticed me gripping his plumicorns tightly. “Soon, Via. Once you are in the egg, you are going to be like one of the boys!” Barnaby chuckled softly, using a taloned foot to itch behind my ear. I fluff, shocked. Then he nudged me to the egg. I put my foot down and stop. I was being very... unbudging.

“Via.” Barnaby warned, her feathers puffing up. I turn to see my friends from my old life looking at me with tears in my eyes.

“Barnaby.” I made my voice equally warning. Now it feels just like when I was a teenager dealing with both him and Sonic: I was being very stubborn and unmoving.

That was when Barnaby lifted Thomas and begin to squeeze. I yelp, raising a wing to stop them from hurting Aliyah. “Don’t hurt my friends! I would do anything!”

Barnaby raised an eyebrow. “Anything? How about a deal? You go in the egg, and your little friends will live. How does that sound?” Barnaby offered, stretching his neck to put his face in front of mine. I pause and think long and hard about it. If I refuse, my friends will die and I will never forgive myself. But if I cooperate...

“Deal.” I enter the egg.

I was ready to die to protect my friends. But Barnaby would never know this because he was too focused on me to realize that I just sold my soul to join the party. I silently apologized and hugged all of my friends before entering the egg. Watching them all with tears in their eyes pained me, but I had to put them before me. That's what a good friend does, right?

“Good! Now relax and enjoy! I promise it will be fun! It won’t hurt!” Barnaby cackled before sealing the egg. I hear it seal with a hiss. I turned to him as he pulled a lever. I couldn’t hear my friends but I bet they were screaming at me for basically throwing away my life to save them. The egg sealed, and I can feel the inside of the egg get warmer. Then I hear Barnaby call out, “Octavia, can you hear me!?”

I nod, noticing the Gem of Transformation. It was a black gem with swirling blue highlights. It got closer and I feel a gentle tug on my soul. I open my mouth to see a black something burst out and grab the gem before fastening it to my double Albert chain. Then I feel as if something was ripping me apart. I black out as the pain got unbearable. I find myself floating in the egg, unconscious. I couldn’t breathe or think. I hear my heart beat fading...

I wake hours later to see Barnaby standing over me. I get up and notice that my wings and feathers were blacker than obsidian. Then I notice the orange outline. I gasp softly, “No! I

was supposed to open a bakery and-!”

Barnaby interrupted me happily, “Via! You did it! YOU’RE DEAD!” Then he swung me around happily as my reality sank in: I died by having my soul injected into the Gem of Transformation. I reach down and touch it, stunned. My friends are all silent. I was stunned too, by the emotional pain.

Chapter 21: Barnaby and Fantoccio Sitting in a Tree...

Chapter by [Thanatophobia \(PuddieBlackCat\)](#)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

I look at all of my friends, who are sobbing terribly. Barnaby, on the other hand, was elated. He shrieked, “LET THE PARTY BEGIN!” There were fireworks, and Barnaboos cheering. They surround me and started crowd surfing me to Barnaby. I yelp as I end up in a bone crushing hug of his. He nuzzled, hooting softly. Then he cleared his throat awkwardly, “Octavia. Welcome home. I am going to need to talk with Fantoccio about something.”

I nod, but instead of diving into the festivities of eating, revelry and playing card games like one would expect, I get smart. I secretly follow Barnaby and watch him duck into his bedroom. I press an ear against the door, listening. What Barnaby and Fantoccio talked about caused me to raise an eyebrow. Apparently Fantoccio was reading a fanfiction that poorly characterized Billie and Barnaby both. The conversation went like this:

Fantoccio: Barnaby, you are not going to like what I gotta say but some people, specifically weirdos have been shipping you and Billie. Like... uh, whatshisface? Yeah, it's weird and disgusting to see you shipped with her. I've read much better fanfiction from-!

Barnaby: That's ridiculous! Billie is not my type! My type is either you, that cute axolotl or Dutch! Plus... she's a little bit too rude for me. There are two possibilities to this. They either genuinely don't know, or they're a creep trying to erase our identities to fit their narrative.

Fantoccio: I know, big owl. But-

Barnaby: Do. Not. Get. Me. Started on the age gap! There's a hundred years between Billie and I! And let's not even talk about the fact that I was 26 when I died!

Fantoccio: Sorry, my darling. But don't you find that kind of writing to be a little bit... uh... how do I put this? A little bit computer generated? Or like a teen wrote it? I have written some cringe stuff in my teens.

I peek through a crack in the door to see Barnaby and Fantoccio kissing each other. Then Barnaby replied, “I've never thought of that before.”

Fantoccio tipped his hat and replied, “There are good writers and there are bad writers. Those who obviously use AI to write for them are clearly bad writers.”

Barnaby added, “Yeah, Octavia had said that artificial intelligence had been known to erase my identity to make me either a lesbian, bisexual or pansexual. Disgusting if you ask me.” I can see his feathers ruffling in outrage, and I realized that this was a very sore subject for Barnaby. Then his orange eyes land on me. “Octavia. Get in here.” Barnaby's voice was crisp. I knew he was annoyed about something, so I enter. The room was surprisingly neat

despite being abandoned. The bedspread has celestial bodies on the covers, with a huge hexagon moon and what looks like the galaxy on the ceiling. I knew this was Barnaby's room, since I can see the organ on the edge of the room. I notice the telescope pointing at the moon and I notice a lot of glow in the dark plushies and stick on stars everywhere.

I force my attention to focus on Barnaby. "Yes, Dad? If it's about why I eavesdrop... It's to check on you." I replied. I was uneasy to anger the powerful ghost owl host. I've seen a fraction of his fury and it's not something for the faint of heart.

Barnaby's feathers laid flat and Fantoccio floated to me. "Octavia? How would you feel if someone called you woke just because you are asexual?" Fantoccio asked quietly, his yellow eyes glowing.

"I would be pissed because that's just the way I am. Just the same way Billie has no interest in romance or sex. They don't need fixing or any of that bullshit." I replied.

Barnaby kissed Fantoccio on the cheek and muttered, "Why would anyone write about me getting with a minor when I clearly have no interest in females or specifically goats who try to steal my stuff and are not even allowed near my manor due to being underage!? I was a parent first! Why would someone do something so vile!?"

I headbutt his wing. "Probably because it's AI generated and to prove that it would spread misinformation quickly." I respond. Then I glared at Fantoccio and grumbled, "Still pissed over the fact that you basically sold my ass to Barn- I mean Dad." Then I excused myself to assess the damage.

I made my way back into the dusty girl's room again. This time it looks freshly cleaned and has a galaxy theme. Even though I'm not fond of space, the fact that it looked like a legit galaxy in my room was pretty kick ass. The bedspread now had a Sonic the Hedgehog comforter on it. I raise an eyebrow. *Looks like Barnaby has been doing their homework on me.* I note dryly. Then I spotted the glow in the dark plushies and that got me squealing in joy as I drummed my talons against my thighs. That's a stim of mine: I get so excited that I would pat my thighs. Then I gazed at the mirror.

I paused as the reality of my situation sank in. I was a shadow of my former self, with an orange outline, a blue waistcoat and a black gem on a double Albert chain. My swirling eyes were heterochrome. One appeared to be like Barnaby's eye, and the other was a swirling green. The pupil was a dark forest green, while the iris was emerald green and my white of my eyes was a pale green. I open my mouth to see that my tongue and the inside of my mouth were orange.

I get on my laptop and decide to just start writing. My feet typed fast as I wrote, and I was surprised that they were good for typing. I rub the gem and find myself turning back into a humanized version. Except it was still dark skinned and chibi. I set off and bump into Aliyah.

"Ali!?" Aliyah exclaimed softly. I put a finger to my lip and usher her back to Norwich. Once I was away, I turned around to say something to her. She had tears staining her dark chocolate skin, and I hugged her plush figure. I let the tears flow, unaware that I was crying orange and green tears. "Ali! Why did you sacrifice yourself to Barna-!" I hush her with a glare.

“I value you guys much more than anything. I may be autistic but the hardest thing about being a good friend to all of you would be doing the right thing, even if it angers those you care about.” I was firm. I didn’t see Barnaby shapeshift or step behind me until Aliyah left. I sigh, hearts in my pupils. “I’m too shy to admit-!”

“That you have a crush on that darling?” A new fruity voice interrupted. I whip my head around to see Barnaby staring at me.

“Octavia, if she rejects you, it is what it is.” Barnaby looked like a human male right now, looking lanky and cartoony. “It took me months after meeting Fantoccio to admit that I had a crush on him. He may be a little silly guy to the fandom, but I love his poems. Now that’s a real writer who doesn’t even use AI!” He sighed dreamily. We both swoon briefly before Barnaby cleared his throat. He glanced at me, then he asked, “Um, Octavia? Do you know how to propose to someone you love?” He seemed shy as he asked.

I whip my head to Barnaby. “Are you asking me for advice on popping the question on marriage?” I ask, stunned. He nodded, sticking his tongue out and looking like a puppy. I knew better: He is a murderous ghost owl... who happened to prefer males. I nod, then gave him advice. Since I did research on Fantoccio, I knew the perfect way for Barnaby to propose to Fantoccio: by proposing during a rendition of Romeo and Juliet. I nod, then I took Barnaby’s ring size... which was a bit large. Then I gave Barnaby a homework assignment of his own: finding out Fantoccio’s ring size. Now is it me or do I hear wedding bells in Barnaby's future?

Chapter End Notes

Yes, more Barntoccio. And actual character development. With a dash of sass and whimsy too. I'm glad you guys are reading and leaving kudos. It means a lot to me to see support and I actually poured my heart into these two chapters. Yes, I'm sick. Yes, I love Barntoccio. And yes, I gave you two chapters as a treat for your patience. I should probably write more of Sonicphobia: The Director's Cut (the prequel to Death and Autism). If you are a minor in this fandom, this is going to annoy you but it's a really good idea to do research first. Just saying. I actively encourage it. And you'll thank me later.

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